

CHANGING THE SUBJECT: CREATING CARING COMMUNITIES
FOR WOMEN IMPACTED BY
ABORTION

Karen Walker-McClure

BA, Northeastern Illinois University, 1998
MDiv, McCormick Theological Seminary, 2004

Mentors

Thomas Francis, DMin
Sharon Ellis Davis, PhD

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Date: _____

Approved: _____

Faculty Mentor: _____

Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies: _____

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ABSTRACT

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The ministry context is Chicago, Illinois. The focus is to help African American women find post abortion healing. The purpose is to facilitate a healing process for women impacted by abortion. The ministry project consists of a weekend retreat to create a safe space for women to work through issues of forgiveness, shame, guilt, and secrets, which will offer them the possibility of moving into a healthier future. Success will be measured through a qualitative analysis utilizing observations, pre-post surveys, and interviews. These measurements will determine the impact of the healing process prior to, during, and after the retreat.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with the utmost humility that I acknowledge those persons who made contributions to the completion of this project. Before I acknowledge any of them, let me first acknowledge my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the true source of my strength. I owe my mentors and faculty consultants gratitude for teaching me to “trust the process.” Dr. Thomas Francis encouraged me to express my feelings in my writing. Dr. Sharon Ellis Davis reminded me that this project is my worship to God. The late Dr. Emma Justes generously shared her books and words of wisdom. Dr. Jerome Stevenson always made sure to point us in the right direction with his wonderful devotionals at the beginning of our focus group sessions.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Joanne Lindstrom, Dr. Bridget Weatherspoon and Dr. Patricia Havis, my professional associates. My encouraging, ageless, peer associate, Dr. Richard North, Mrs. Dorsey Rivers-Gardner, Mrs. Gail Bennett-Walker, Ms. Crystal Kimbrough and my sister, Mrs. Elaine Parker, who stepped in wherever they were needed during the project. Rev. Pearline Pope who bathed the retreat center in prayer. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the two sisters who God gave me as co-workers in this ministry, Minister Pamela Bell and Dr. Karen Stevenson (also my Professional Associate). I am convinced that God put us together for such a time as this. Last but certainly not least, my husband, John, who drove me to Dayton to attend open house. He has supported, prayed for and encouraged me during

those times when I thought I was not going to make it. To my editor extraordinaire, Dr. Lori D. Spears, to the United Theological Seminary staff, Dr. Harold Hudson and Janice Kronour, I am grateful for each of you for your contributions. I am thoroughly convinced that it takes a whole village to become a Doctor of the Church. To God be the Glory!

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to four very important women in my life. First, to my mother, Sadie, who at the time of this writing is 101 years old and the strongest, wisest woman I have ever known. I am honored to be her daughter for it is because of her that I am the woman I am today. She taught me everything I know about being a woman. She has so openly shared her secrets with me and allowed me to see her mistakes, vulnerabilities, strengths and weaknesses; she has allowed me to share mine with her without judgment or condemnation. Mother this work is dedicated to you.

My second dedication is to my daughter, Allison, who has made me proud to be called her mother. In addition to being my daughter, she is also my friend. She has allowed me to be my authentic self and has encouraged and prayed for me as I have matriculated through this program. I am so proud of the wonderful mother she has become and the close relationship she has with her own daughter.

The third woman I dedicate this work to is my granddaughter, Ariana, who is the joy of my life. It is amazing for me to watch her become the woman God is molding and shaping her to be. I am delighted that she will be completing her Bachelor of Arts degree one week before the commencement of my Doctor of Ministry. I will be forever grateful that God has blessed four generations of women to be strong, confident and loving to each other.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my cousin and best friend, Barbara Lynn Brown, who made her transition from this life to eternal life four days before I attended the open house at United Theological Seminary to inquire about the Doctor of Ministry program. It was Lynn who encouraged me to further my education. I really miss her, but I am thankful that she had such a strong, positive influence on my life. To these four women, I dedicate this work.

INTRODUCTION

The project is entitled “Changing the Subject: Creating Caring Communities for Women Impacted by Abortion.” My project will be to address the emotional impact that abortion has on women; the issues in which they have not been allowed to grieve and how not grieving may impact other areas of their lives.

Chapter one is designated as the Ministry Focus which highlights the spiritual journey and the contextual analysis. It also provides the synergistic energies between the two. This chapter helps the reader to understand the moving of God’s hand, which brought the author to the current state and one of the aspects of ministry.

The second chapter reflects the biblical foundation of the project. The Old Testament scripture selected was 2 Samuel 11:26-27, 12:24. This particular narrative was selected because reading the story of Bathsheba indicated, she suffered very significant losses in a short time and could have possibly experienced some issues of unresolved grief. She experienced an inordinate amount of grief and suffering during a short period of time. Bathsheba was married to a soldier named Uriah. While he was at war, she slept with King David, found out she was pregnant, and sent word back to the king. The king then had her husband murdered. After going through a brief period of grief Bathsheba was then taken into the king’s palace to be married to him. All in a matter of a few months or so.

What happens next is even more devastating. 2 Samuel 11:27b lets us know that God was displeased with what David had done and sent the prophet Nathan to give King David a parable about a rich man taking a poor man's sheep. David thought the story was true and was incensed by the callousness of the rich man only to find out the rich man represented himself and the poor man represented Uriah (Bathsheba's slain husband). God's punishment for the adulterous relationship and subsequent murder was that the child Bathsheba was carrying would die. David begged God not to take the baby's life, but after a seven-day illness the baby died. Though the text does not tell us how Bathsheba grieved the loss of her first born, verse twenty-four says, "Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba and he went to her and lay with her." Indicating that she grieved the loss of her baby. It is my assertion that Bathsheba had to deal with unresolved issues of grief over the loss of her husband, marrying his murderer and the loss of first born child. Grief unresolved is unhealthy grief.

When ministering with women who have been impacted by abortion, this text will offer a biblical example of how circumstances that are shameful can be a stumbling block toward healing from the loss of a child. Although Bathsheba did not experience an abortion, she had plenty of reasons to experience shame and guilt. This coupled with not having a faith community to aide in the healing can result in unresolved grief and unhealthy healing. Having a biblical example of this will also show how many of the issues we experienced that has brought us shame are also part of our biblical narrative. Yet, even in the midst of suffering there is a word of liberation and hope to bring us healing as exemplified in the Gospel of Matthew.

The New Testament text is Matthew 5:4 “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.” This text is found in what is called the Sermon on the Mount and was selected because of the focus on unresolved grief. It is my desire to illustrate through the word of God that even though we may mourn we can still be blessed. This text gives hope to those who mourn and calls them bless. Using this text, will offer women hope and healing as their situation is offered up as an example of how Jesus views those in mourning, in his blessings. This New Testament text directs us to the ability to hope in the Lord that we can be blessed even as we mourn. In his Sermon on the Mount, one interesting fact about what Jesus is teaching is that those whom he says are blessed are not necessarily endowed with musical talent or artistic ability, they are not the highly intelligent or well educated. Those that he is calling blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn. Those who Jesus is calling blessed hardly seem to be blessed in this world’s view. As we “change the subject,” this text is a starting place to give other biblical examples of how God loves, cares for, and forgives those who others have deemed as outcast. As in the title of the ministry project, changing the subject highlights biblical examples of healing and hope for those who have lost the hope that they are loved and cared for by God as well as the church community.

The concept of a blessing was very important in the Ancient Near East; so much more than today. Today we use the term loosely, but during biblical times blessings were very important in the life of the faith community. To bless meant to be filled with benefits and to be blessed by God was considered the essential element of a successful and satisfying life.

The text then reminds us that there is more than one way to mourn. One way to mourn is to be sorrowful. You may mourn over the loss of a loved one, or a relationship that is ending. You may mourn the loss of a job or a career. Jesus promised in the text that those who mourn will be comforted. Scripture declares that God comforts his people in times of distress. When someone comforts they bring strength to you and when God comforts, God strengthens. We can also find comfort by sharing with someone else in the midst of our own pain. God will comfort us in our own mourning; when we bear each other burdens or share in each other's pain. One of the ways in which I believe people will be comforted during this ministry project is by sharing their stories with others and sharing in each other's pain.

Chapter three is the historical reflection of the project. Research indicates that historically abortions can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome. In antiquity concerns about abortion were rarely, if at all regarding the fetus because the fetus was not considered a human. Concerns were more for the health and welfare of the mother and the father.

From the earliest days of ancient Greece and Rome, abortion was more common among the wealthy than among the poor. Motives for obtaining an abortion were no less varied in antiquity than they are today. However, many times rich women were motivated to have abortions because they did not want to share their wealth with "lower-class children" fathered illegitimately. Another motivation for rich women to abort was their desire to preserve their sex appeal, and not wanting to lose their figures by having babies.

Methods for abortion also varied in antiquity. Some women took poisons, some took mixtures of herbs and alcohol; still others used mechanical methods to cause

abortion. Some women chose to bind their bodies tightly around the womb while others struck the womb in an attempt to expel the fetus. Other methods were done by using abortive instruments.

Both Plato and Aristotle recommended population control by abortion. For the rich, who did not want to share their wealth with many children, abortion was an option and also for the poor who could not afford to support large families. Abortion was also used as a means of contraception.

During the early fourth and fifth centuries, the first ecclesiastical laws against abortion were passed. If women committed adultery, became pregnant and had an abortion, she would not be able to receive communion or be baptized until she was on her death bed. Some laws required that women be excommunicated for life for having abortions.

In 1871 the American Medical Association sponsored a study indicating that approximately one million women were having abortions annually in the United States. Not much has changed because in 2011 statistics indicated that one point one million women in the U.S. had abortions. The number of women who were having abortions back then and who are having them now are at an equal rate.

In 1973, the landmark “Roe v. Wade” decision impacted abortion laws in the United States. The law came to being as a result of a Texas woman who alleged that she had been raped and was denied the right to have a legalized abortion. The case traveled from the Texas courts to the Supreme Court. However, the case took so long, as her pregnancy proceeded she made the decision to have the baby. This case impacted laws that are still in effect today. In Roe versus Wade, the Supreme Court decided that during

the first trimester the state could not control abortion in any way. During the second trimester, the state could only control the abortion if it was unhealthy for the fetus or the mother and in the third trimester the state could completely control the abortion of the fetus if it was viable in order to protect the fetus.

Prior to the 1960s, studies of the psychological effects of abortion indicated almost without exception that abortion caused trauma and posed a severe threat to the psychological wellbeing of the women who had them. However, by the late 1960s the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association reversed their decision stating that further research indicated that abortion was safe and had no harmful psychological effects on the mother.

In the late 1970s and 1980s a few women who had experienced emotional and or physical problems after abortion decided to band together to organize support groups and provide counseling for women traumatized by abortion. They disagreed with the findings of the AMA and APA. Out of this movement organizations supporting women who had experienced trauma after abortion were formed.

In addition to a “Biblical method of changing the subject,” the Historical information gathered will help women to understand the historical context and how women have been dealing with the stigma of abortions throughout history. History gives a modern perspective on an ancient issue. History sets the tone in the evolution and dynamics surrounding issues specific to women. As women understand they are not the first to experience these issues of shame, guilt, and un-forgiveness, their shame will find community, offer hope for healing, and make the secret more exposed to provide the environment for healing.

Chapter four is the theological foundational model. All too often women, especially African American women, who have experienced abortion, end up suffering needlessly because of the secrets, shame, and guilt associated with the sin of abortion preached, taught and lived out in many faith traditions. The time has come to change the subject from whether or not one should have an abortion, to how to minister to the millions of women who had abortions and kept it a secret because they were ashamed of being judged; or they believe they cannot ask for forgiveness because they knew what they were doing.

The question becomes, “How do we create safe places for women to tell and retell their stories so they can be liberated from the secret, shame and guilt they have carried around for many years?” It is not God’s intention that women should suffer because of their choice. God is a God of liberation, healing and grace and not one who would desire that women live their lives in secret, shame and guilt, not receiving the forgiveness of others or not being able to forgiving herself.

The church has been one way to find liberation from our oppression and oppressors. Many men and women have found hope in the black church when there was no other way. Yet it was through discourse of black liberation, womanist and confessional theology that really set the framework for my theological position. My theological position has been influenced by the voices of James Cone and Dwight Hopkins as liberation theologians, as well as womanist theologians Stephanie Mitchem, Alice Walker and Linda Hollies. Finally, the voice of Dr. Frank Thomas who introduced confessional theology; our faith seeking understanding as we admit and confess our faults

one to another freeing us up to openly acknowledge that we are not perfect. These theological discourses have helped to develop the position for the project.

In the theoretical foundation chapter, (five) the discussion occurred with pastoral care professionals who are experts in grief counseling, therapists who have done extensive research on the subject of the unspoken pain of abortion and professionals who argue against any psychological or physical challenges associated with abortion.

In the book titled, *All Our Losses, All Our Grief*, the authors indicated that since no two occasions for grieving are exactly the same, grief is always a response to the particular loss of the object. In other words, an individual's grief is primarily related to the particular loss and though people grieve differently, there are also some similarities in the way people grieve.

In *Sisters of the Yam*, Dr. Bell Hooks explained differences in ways that African Americans experience death from their Caucasian counterparts. She observed from her own life's experiences that death in the black culture was a time not only for grieving but rejoicing. "The Home Going Celebration" is a time in which to celebrate the life of your loved one but you can also openly grieve loss. Dr. Hooks also indicated that in the African American community, death is one of the rare moments when it is socially acceptable for folks to let go emotionally. During death, we can break down and surrender to grief. Grieving is important to the process of emotional healing after a loss.

Dr. Ed Wimberly recommends that telling our stories is one way in which to find healing along with telling biblical stories and preaching. He indicated that changing views that people bring to events and relationships can be done through storytelling.

Wimberly suggested that stories should be told in a way that the person will be able to see themselves and their circumstances differently.

In closing, we must address the problems of creating a caring community for women who have been impacted by abortion. There are some women who have experienced an abortion and have no regrets or psychological challenges. This project is not for those women. This project will be for those who have not been allowed to grieve in a way that can help bring healing and closure to them.

Clinical and pastoral care professionals have both indicated that care can be provided to persons experiencing grief by storytelling, both biblical and through their own testimonies. Also, providing persons with the tools to work their way through the different phases of denial and to work through the guilt and shame they have been living with will be my project goal.

Consequently, all of the foundation chapters offered will play a specific role in education, as well as offer theological, biblical, and theoretical perspectives to significantly change the subject from guilt and shame to healing and hope for a future. These foundations will offer a holistic approach to healing in mind, body, and spirit.

Chapter six serves as the final chapter which provides an overview of the project. The project analysis provides detailed information as it relates to the methods that were used to create, establish and implement the project. It also identifies the outcomes, summary, reflections and the desire for continued research.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

This chapter is dedicated to combining my spiritual autobiography and contextual analysis with the work of God's Holy Spirit to develop the doctoral project. I am so grateful and honored that God allows me to work in God's ministry to aid in the healing of hurting people. I am clear that God allows me to participate in God's ministry for the up-building of God's kingdom. "God's spirit is on me, he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor, Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, To set the burdened and battered free, to announce, "This is God's year to act!" (Luke 4:18).¹

Growing up in a close-knit family allowed us to share much of our trauma with other family members. In my family two of my sisters had children while they were in their teens. Also, my favorite cousin who was my same age had a child in her teens. I had promised myself that I would not be a teenaged mother. I kept my promise to myself. There was some embarrassment associated with being a teenaged mother, even though our family was very supportive of my siblings and cousin who had children. My family always believed that if you had a need, everyone would pitch in to make sure the need

¹ Biblical citations within this document are from the New Revised Standard Version unless stated otherwise.

was met. There was plenty of support for them from members of the family. When the babies were born, they were well taken care of, and never wanted for anything. The family would baby-sit, provide financial support and support them in furthering their education if there was a desire. Having a child at an early age was accepted, but definitely not encouraged. The family never turned their backs on individuals when mistakes were made and did not make individuals feel less than a human being. Regardless of the situation that a family member faced, they were shown love and acceptance. After all, having a baby was not the end of the world.

Abortion on the other hand is an experience that most women go through alone. The pain and grief that one experiences from abortion can be rarely if at all discussed. If by chance, someone was informed of the pregnancy, some would be quick to tell you that you have done the right thing because you do not have a husband; or you are too young. Or some will ask how are you going to take care of a baby by yourself? Or, some will say you can always have another one. As a single person, if you are contemplating having an abortion and you discuss it with someone, rarely does anyone encourage you to have the child. Rarely do you hear "God will take care of you and the child." Most persons remind you that you have a right to do what you want with your own body. Your body belongs to you and even the father does not have any input about the matter.

Until I began to do research on the effects of abortion on women, I never considered that there may be any adverse effects on men. As a woman I always felt that men were so far removed from the procedure and so disconnected that the only affect it could possibly have on them would be a sigh of relief that they did not have to have a child and no one would know the difference. Never did I consider that fathers are

affected by abortion also. I never thought about the fact that fathers may also grieve the loss of their child, or the loss of the possibility of having a child. While writing about this, I was reminded of a conversation I had with my older brother shortly before he lost his battle with cancer. He was talking about his life and mentioned that he had never had kids. He said, “All of mine were flushed down the toilet. Sometimes I wonder what my life would have been like if I had had kids? I guess it just wasn’t meant to be.” I listened to him speak of the loss of his children to abortion. Even then, I did not think it could have the same effect on him, mine did on me. But why not?

As I began to do research I ran across an article entitled “Forgotten Fathers and Their Unforgettable Children.” This article sparked my interest because it was about the loss that men experience when their partner has an abortion. According to Dr. Vincent Rue, one of the nation’s most experienced psychologists in the field of post-abortion issues:

Induced abortion reinforces defective problem solving on the part of the male by encouraging detachment, desertion, and irresponsibility... Abortion rewrites the rules of masculinity. While a male is expected to be strong, abortion makes him feel weak. A male is expected to be responsible, yet abortion encourages him to act without concern for the innocent and to destroy any identifiable and undesirable outcomes of his sexual decision making and/or attachments... Whether or not the male was involved in the abortion decision, his inability to function in a socially prescribed manner (i.e. to protect and provide) leaves him wounded and confused.²

With this information being brought to my attention, I feel led to develop a project that would include a session with women, a session with men and possibly a session with both

² Vincent M. Rue and Cynthia Tellefsen, “The Effects of Abortion on Men: Its Emotional, Psychological and Relational Impact,” The Catholic Culture, accessed November 24, 2014, <http://www.theuhcoice.com/Men/forgottenfathers.htm>.

men and women. I would also like to hear the stories of men who have been affected by abortion and hopefully help them to find closure.

There have been studies done on both pro-life and pro-choice sides that agree that there is trauma associated with abortion. The loss of a child is very traumatic and because a person who aborts has usually made the choice to do it, for whatever the reason. Persons who had an abortion may feel they have to do it for some of the following reasons: (1) They do not want anyone to know they were ever pregnant. (2) They do not feel as if they have the support system needed to take care of a child. (3) The father convinces them that they do not want any children. (4) Familial or peer pressure causes them to make the decision.

Studies have shown that women who have an abortion feel that they do not have the right to grieve because it was a decision they made. Therefore, there have been very few processes in place to help a woman grieving from abortion. Many times, if a woman reaches out to the clinic where the abortion was performed, they are told their hormones are out of whack because of the procedure and they will be fine in a few weeks. Others may be told, they just have to live with the decision they made.

In her book, *Forbidden Grief, the Unspoken Pain of Abortion*, Dr. Theresa Burke said:

Grief can be healing. It signals our living and feeling in connection with others. It represents our vulnerability, our humanity. When we remember and mourn our losses, we free our souls to move beyond the pain. This is the purpose of funerals. As difficult as they are, they provide a public expression of our grief, a way to say goodbye while surrounded by friends and love ones, and place to remember with dignity our lasting connections to one another. Women who undergo abortions are never permitted this social connection.³

³ Theresa Burke and David C. Reardon, *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2007), 64.

Therefore, they have no way to publicly express the grief of their lost child or to say goodbye. They must suffer in silence and secret.

I chose a church setting as the place of my context because “the church” has been silent on the issue of abortion. The church may speak out against abortion and teach that abortion is sin, but no one tells the mother or father about what to do after the abortion. No one says, “Because we know that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, this is how you can be helped even if you’ve done that. God loves you too.” There is a need for a ministry so persons can be restored in their relationship with God. Or be introduced for the first time into a relationship with God. Many times, persons who have experienced abortion feel that they cannot talk to anyone. They can experience guilt, fear and disappointment. They may sometimes feel that God would not want to have a relationship with them because of what they have done. The church does not minister to those persons, individually or in a group. So how do you get over the pain and guilt when so many women sitting in our churches have experienced it?

In my faith tradition, churches have ministries for substance abuse. They have ministries for single mothers, children and men. Most recently there have been ministries popping up for women who are victims of domestic and sexual abuse. However, I do not know of any ministries that give women and men permission to grieve the loss of their aborted babies so they can be healed. Abortion is such a taboo subject; people are uncomfortable talking about it. Yet according to statistics one in three women experienced an abortion. Which means that one third of the women sitting in our congregations have had abortions. Age does not matter. There are women who have been carrying this guilt for forty years and some who just recently had one.

Pastors have no problem providing pastoral care to persons who have lost a loved one; but when it comes to providing care to those who have had an abortion, women and men have few places to go to receive restoration from the shame, or safe places to grieve the loss of their child so healing can begin. How can they be restored to wholeness?

While writing my spiritual autobiography, I was reminded of the shame and embarrassment I encountered because of my experience. The first draft I wrote only included one of the abortions I had; because I was ashamed to confess (especially to those who I would have to share my autobiography with) that I had two. I felt that someone might pass judgment on me. After writing the first draft I felt as if I was not being completely honest with myself. I wrestled back and forth about whether or not to include the second one. However, when I thought about the reason I applied to this doctoral program, I realized that the whole purpose was to bring healing to my brokenness and at the same time become a doctor of the church to assist in the healing of other persons like myself. It was with that realization that I knew that I could not write only part of my story. I included the second abortion and though I felt shame, I also felt a sense of relief because I knew that I was being true to myself. It is my belief that you cannot receive healing from any pain without being transparent and open to the pain. When I realized that nothing in my autobiography bothered me more than the abortions, I knew that my project should be to help women who were like myself. I know that I am not the only person who experienced the guilt and shame of abortion. I know I am not the only woman who kept that a secret.

I have a very close clergy sister. We have been friends for many years. I was sharing with her about where God was leading me with this project and told her how I

was initially embarrassed to write in my spiritual autobiography that I had two abortions but decided to be true to myself. She responded, “Girl, I’ve had two too.” All of these years we have been friends. We have travelled together, shared secrets; but that was one secret we kept from each other. She continued, “I want you to know I will support your project in whatever way you want me to. In fact, I might be one of those women you will be ministering to.” If we are two ordained clergy, how many more of us are there? Women from all walks of life are holding on to their secret.

In my spiritual autobiography I talked about how my grandfather rose early in the morning to pray and how prayer was an integral part of my family’s tradition. Though, I am not sure I will ever be the prayer warrior my grandfather was, prayer is one of the most important spiritual disciplines in my life. Prayer sustained me during my most difficult times and God has guided me to make the most important decisions in my life through prayer. I must admit I had some apprehensions about dealing with such a subject, for a few reasons but I know that this is a calling on my life. God knows that there are so many persons who the enemy has tricked into believing that they are not worthy of God’s love, or not worthy of accepting a calling that is on their life because of the things they have done in the past.

In my spiritual autobiography I also talked about how God led me to listen to a Christian radio program on the subject of women who had abortions years ago, but still felt ashamed about it. As I listened I realized that though it happened many years before, I still carried shame about my past. I talked about how listening to the program brought back painful memories that I thought I no longer had. When we bury our pain and do not deal with it or even accept it as pain or grief it will continue to resurface in one way or

another. While driving in my car with tears streaming down my face, I joined the other countless women who were listening to that program in prayer. I asked God to heal me from the shame and guilt that I still carried because of the choices I made as a young adult. When an offer was made to purchase a book written by one of the guests on the show I ordered the book. Though it was fictional, to my surprise the book ministered to me. I have no doubt that God directed me to that program because God knew there was a stronghold of guilt and shame in my life that would keep me from the calling that was yet to come. I know that God wanted me to be healed so I could accept the call that God would later place on my life to minister. I realized that, but never in my wildest dreams did it ever occur to me that God would also use my healing to help others be healed. I thank God for the privilege.

Pastoral care classes as a student and my chaplain internship at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Chicago have given me a foundation for providing care to hurting people. Also, providing pastoral care during the ten years that I served as a senior pastor has taught me listening skills and compassion for those who are hurt and grieving the loss of a loved one. As a pastor, I had to minister to both men and women. I had to sit at the hospital bed with my members as their loved ones were departing this earth and then prepared a home going celebration and eulogy after their loved ones were deceased. Additionally, I have done follow up care for them after their loved ones were deceased.

When my granddaughter lived for two days and died, I had to get my daughter counseling to help her deal with her loss. I saw firsthand the pain she experienced of losing her child. I walked with her through her pain. I prayed with her through her pain. I also, found counseling for her so someone else could help her deal with her grief.

When a child is stillborn, mothers are allowed to grieve. When a woman has a miscarriage, the parents are expected to grieve. When a baby lives for a short time and dies because of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) the mother is given sympathy and permitted to grieve. However, when a woman chooses to abort, some people think she does not have the right to grieve. Therefore, she hides her pain and allows it to fester and manifest itself in many different ways.

After experiencing abortion, some women feel that they are not worthy to be loved by a man. Some fear they will never have another child. Some feel that God is punishing them when bad things happen to them. In addition to the guilt, they also are holding shame and embarrassment. I want them to know that God has forgiven them. I want them to know they can be forgiven and lead a productive, successful, spirit filled life. In the African American church there is a song that says, "It is no secret what God can do. What He's done for others, He'll do for you." I want them to know what God did for me and God can do for them. I want them to know that they have permission to grieve the child that they lost and then to seek healing that only God can give.

When my granddaughter died, I asked the doctor if I should remove all of the baby clothes and baby bed out of the bedroom before my daughter came home from the hospital. He advised me to let her do it because my removing the things denied her the right to validate the existence of her baby. He said, she might think that we were trying to act as if her baby never existed. He went on to say, acting as if the baby never existed would cause additional pain and anger because she knew she had a baby. There must be a time to grieve the loss and then progression to move forward can take place.

From the tragedy of dealing with my granddaughter's death, I learned to see God in a different way. I learned to know God as a mighty counselor, because he counseled me. I would like to introduce the persons in my project to the Mighty Counselor. Due to that tragedy, God was no longer someone who I could just ask for things, but I began to see God as someone who walked with me through my pain and suffering. I would like to introduce them to the God who can walk through their pain and suffering with them. I began to see God as someone who mended my daughter's broken heart. I want to introduce them to the God who mends broken hearts. I want to introduce them to the God who forgives us for every sin (past, present and future) and remind them that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." I want restoration to take place to those who are part of the project just as God restored me.

As I indicated earlier, I never thought about post-abortive father's grieving, but as I did research I found out that fathers also grieve. I feel the need to repent, because I have always thought only about how the women are affected post-abortion. I feel compelled to find a way to ask the men to forgive us on behalf of the women who have aborted their children without their permission and/or knowledge.

I believe the church should be a safe place for hurting people to be able to deal with their pain without the fear of being judged, ostracized or rejected. It is of the utmost importance that those being ministered to, be assured that whatever they share will be kept in the strictest confidentiality. I believe many people are afraid of the church because someone in the church has hurt them and they no longer feel like the church is a place where they can feel safe and secure. I want hurting people to feel the comfort of

God's love in the church. I want them to know that God can and will heal them if they will trust God to be their healer.

I entered into the Doctor of Ministry program, to better understand who I am. I know that God has called me to minister to hurting people. I know that God has not allowed me to go through all I have been through just to keep it to myself. I am blessed to be a blessing. I am healed to help bring healing. I have been restored to assist in the restoration of another sister or brother. I have been delivered, so someone else can be delivered. Christ has set me free. He or she who the son sets free, is free indeed. I want to help someone else be free in Christ.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Bible has been a source of comfort for those who are trying to make some sense out of things that happen in their lives. When we are looking for answers to some of life's most difficult questions we can turn to the Old and New Testaments for guidance. For my biblical research I have decided to use two biblical narratives for my project. The Old Testament scripture is taken from 2 Samuel and the New Testament is from the 5th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. The Old Testament texts are: 2 Samuel 11:26-27, 12:24.

Old Testament

When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord (2 Samuel 11:26-27)

Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him (2 Samuel 12:24)

Bathsheba is the character selected for the Old Testament scripture because she suffered very significant losses in a very short time and could possibly have experienced some issues of unresolved grief. In order to get the full effect of Bathsheba's story, it is important to understand the text in which the biblical narrative originates.

The research topic of discussion for the project will be on the healing of unresolved grief due to abortion. Although Bathsheba did not have an abortion, there are two instances in the biblical narrative where she may not have had the opportunity to grieve significant losses. Though the biblical narrative does not imply what type of repercussions came from the unresolved grief, it is questionable whether or not she had an opportunity to express these very important losses in her life.

According to the Hebrew Bible, it tells us Bathsheba possessed great beauty and was the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. She became a widow, pregnant with a baby conceived in an adulterous affair probably not of her choosing. She lamented the death of her husband and became one of David's wives after the mourning period for her dead husband. She suffered the illness and death of her first son and bore David four more children. One, a son named Solomon, became Israel's king, and was noted for his wisdom and power. From the moment King David first viewed Bathsheba in her ritual bath until the enthronement of her son Solomon, Bathsheba continued to be a woman of fierce tenacity, a woman who found ways to beat the odds. More than a survivor of King David's court, she became the first queen mother of Israel.¹

2 Samuel 11:17, 26 and 27 states,

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't that Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant." So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his masters' servants and did not go down to his house. When David was told, "Uriah did not go home," He asked him, "Haven't you just come from a distance? Why didn't you go home?" Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped

¹ Helen Bruch Person, *Mother Roots: The Female Ancestors of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Press, 2002), 156.

in the open fields. How could I go to my house and eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!” Then David said to him, “Stay here one more day, and tomorrow, I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. At David’s invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master’s servants; he did not go home. In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote “Put Uriah in the front line where the fight is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.” So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David’s army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died. When Uriah’s wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing displeased the Lord.

The text begins by stating that it was the time of the year when kings go out to battle (2 Samuel 11:1) For some unknown reason David did not go out to battle with his army.

One evening while King David is walking on the palace roof, he observed a woman bathing on her roof (2 Sam. 11:2). According to the text the woman was very beautiful and David inquired and learned that she was Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah one of his soldiers who happens to be at war at the time (2 Sam. 11:3). He sent for her and slept with her and she return home (2 Sam. 11:4).

There are many different theories as to whether Bathsheba willingly slept with the king, whether what he did to her was rape, or if he overpowered her because he was king, or whether Bathsheba intentionally seduced the king by taking a bath on her roof top. However, commentators indicated that the rooftop of the palace was the highest in the kingdom and King David was therefore able to look over the entire city from his rooftop. Bathsheba only shared few words in the text so we really do not know her side of the story.

By portraying Bathsheba in an ambiguous light, the narrator leaves her vulnerable, not simply to assault by David but also to misappropriation by those

who come after him to spy on the bathing beauty and offer their versions of, or commentary on, the story. In particular, the withholding of Bathsheba's point of view leaves her open to the charge of seduction.²

Many commentaries written by men painted a picture of Bathsheba as a seductress who bathed on the rooftop in hopes of the king or some other man seeing her. As if she was some "desperate housewife." Some biblical scholars actually blamed Bathsheba for the adulteress relationship. Yet further research indicated that her bath was a ritual purification bath that was taken by Jewish women at the end of a woman's menstrual cycle.

This passage establishes that Bathsheba was performing not an ordinary bath when David noticed her but the ritual immersion required seven days after the end of a women's menstrual period. Still practiced by Orthodox Jewish women, this bath signifies spiritual renewal and permits a woman and her husband to resume marital relations.³

The king saw her bathing, sent for her, slept with her and sent her back home. The text gives us no indication of it being anything but a casual one-night encounter. There was no courtship. No infatuation. No feelings. No relationship, just a one-night affair with the king.

Then Uriah's wife returned to her house as a polluted woman, made unclean by David's invasion of her body. Though the king sent for her and molested her, if found out, Bathsheba would be subject to a charge of adultery. Guilt carried a sentence of death by stoning. Since the woman was usually blamed, Bathsheba knew what her fate would be.⁴

Bathsheba later finds out she was pregnant (not by her husband who was at war but by the king). She then sent word back to David that she was carrying a child (2 Sam. 11:5). David had not figured Bathsheba's pregnancy into his selfish

² J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 215.

³ Rose Sallbert Kam, *Their Stories, Our Stories: Women of the Bible* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1995), 124.

⁴ Pearson, *Mother Roots*, 158.

action; he could see the dark clouds of tragedy on the not-too-distant horizon. The exposure of his crime against Uriah could lead to his death by stoning. Not even kings were exempt from the laws of Israel (Deut. 22:22; Lev. 20:10). His plan to cover his indiscretion did not include marrying Uriah's wife. The text does not indicate that he had any feelings of compassion for the woman or guilt about his actions. Nor does it hint that David took any blame or responsibility for the dilemma he had created. David was concerned for his safety. His life depended on it.⁵

David quickly sent for Uriah under the pretense of finding out how Joab and the other soldiers were progressing in the battle (2 Sam. 11:6-7). In truth he sent for him because he wanted him to sleep with his wife so the pregnancy could be blamed on him (2 Sam. 11:8). Uriah instead slept with the servants at the entrance of the palace (2 Sam. 11:9). When David learns that he did not go home that night, the next night he got Uriah drunk hoping that he would go home after that. Even in his drunkenness Uriah still remains loyal to his king and to Israel. Finally, David decided to have Uriah killed. He writes a letter to Joab telling him to put Uriah on the front lines of the battle and withdraw so he can be killed. He gives Uriah his death sentence to take back to battle (2 Sam. 11:14-15).

Uriah went back to battle, gave Joab the letter, and just as instructed by David, Joab puts him on the front line and he was killed. When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him (2 Sam. 11:26). Verse twenty-six gives us Bathsheba's first encounter with grief. One can ponder how guilty Uriah's wife must have felt about her husband's death? Even if she did not know that the king was responsible for his death, she knew that she recently slept with the king and was pregnant with his child. There had to be some level of guilt or shame. Or did her infidelity make her feel as if she was somehow responsible for her husband's death? Since her voice is silent in the text no one knows how she mourned for her husband. We do not know

⁵ Pearson, *Mother Roots*, 161.

exactly what her feelings were after her husband died nor do we really know how she felt about her husband before his death. The text gives us no clue about how she felt about him. Though it does not tell us she loved him, it does not tell us that she did not love him either. However, there are some things that we can observe from the text that may give us some insight of his character.

We do know by virtue of his response to David as he was trying to get him to go home and sleep with his wife that Uriah was a loyal man. He could not bring himself to go home and sleep with his wife while the other soldiers were out fighting in battle. We also must observe that her husband was a strong man because even being under the influence of alcohol, he did not weaken to the point of going home to sleep with his “beautiful” wife.

Uriah the Hittite’s name meant “God is light,” Which suggests a probable conversion to Yahweh. The Hittites had settled in the land before the time of David, but under David’s rule all the non-Israelite tribes and clans, including the few remaining Hittites, officially became “Israelites.” Many adopted Hebrew names, as Uriah did. Yahweh, the LORD, became their god but not necessarily their only god. Many assimilated “Israelites” still engaged in god and goddess worship alongside their worship of the Hebrew LORD. The old rituals of their holy places and their daily lives changed little for most of these assimilated peoples. But the fact that Uriah had taken the Israelite soldiers battle vow of sexual abstinence suggests that he was more than a casual convert. Uriah, inflexible and single-minded was a pious and committed man of integrity and fidelity to his king.⁶

Bathsheba’s husband was a man of integrity. The fact that he would not sleep with his wife while the ark of God and the soldiers were all sleeping outside says much about his integrity. Additionally, David gave him a letter (his own death sentence) to take back to Joab. David trusted that Uriah would not open the letter and read it on his way back to battle. Therefore, Uriah can be viewed as a man of integrity.

⁶ Pearson, *Mother Roots*, 159.

Uriah's wife lamented the death of her husband. She lamented that despite her youth, she was now a widow and pregnant. She lamented that her dead husband was not the father of the child she carried. Bathsheba had much to mourn but whether her heart was truly broken or whether she was performing a mourning ritual, we do not know.⁷

Second Samuel 11: 27 states, "After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son." The usual mourning lasted seven days according to Samuel 31:13. Bathsheba was probably taken to live with David shortly after this time of mourning. If the mourning time was only seven days, the time was short enough to allow Bathsheba's child to appear as if it was conceived after she became David's wife.

Becoming a widow, with or without a child, in the Israelite culture of that day placed a woman in a vulnerable, powerless, and frightening situation. Women gained status, power, or prominence only through the men to whom they were attached - - a father, a brother, a betrothed, a husband or sons birthed by them. A married woman had access to society through her husband but a widow like Uriah's wife was at a social and economic disadvantage in her culture. This stigma probably would make Uriah's wife willing and grateful to marry any man who would have her.⁸

The experience that Bathsheba went through was traumatic and there was most likely a component of gratitude to have someone to care for the child. Although the text does not indicate if she was, excited or sad about the new living arrangements with David. One has to ponder how Bathsheba felt about losing her husband of integrity and being taken into the palace to live with a man who appeared to have very little.

When Bathsheba found that her husband had been killed, she mourned for him. Whether her mourning was simply to fulfill ritual law, or whether she truly cared for Uriah and lamented his death, the reader will never know. In any case, any pregnant woman with no husband - - especially a woman whose pregnancy was not due to her husband! - - had every reason to mourn! She had become the truly powerless person in ancient Israel. The narrator reports that when the period of

⁷ Pearson, *Mother Roots*, 160-161.

⁸ Pearson, *Mother Roots*, 161.

mourning had passed David sent for Bathsheba. She then became David's wife and bore him their son.⁹

To lose a husband of integrity and to be placed into the home of one who would stop at nothing to save his life speaks volumes of what must have been going through her mind as she moved into the palace to live with the king. Though she had to experience some relief that David took her to be his wife, it is possible that she lamented being in that position. What was she thinking as she moved from the familiar home that she shared with her husband into the palace with the unscrupulous king? Additionally, the text implied that Bathsheba was the only wife of Uriah. Marrying David would make her one of his many wives.

Biblical scholars and movies about David and Bathsheba have romanticized their relationship to indicate that living in the palace with the king would put her in an exalted position. She would no longer be the poor wife of a Hittite, she would now be the wife of King David, one of the most powerful men in the ancient near east. However, if she loved her husband, being the wife of the king would not be a position of desire for her. It is not known how she felt about anything in this narrative. The only time she spoke was to inform the king that she was pregnant.

With the mourning period over, David again sent for Uriah's wife. This time she came to him as an available widow. He expressed no concern for her situation or for the grief he had initiated through the arranged killing of her husband. Instead, he evidenced only greed, self-gratification, and abuse of power. Taking Bathsheba as his wife was David's last chance to cover up his adultery. Bathsheba's feelings are not indicated in the text. Still known only as Uriah's wife she became the wife of the man, albeit the king, who first had victimized her and then had her husband conveniently killed. Now she would give birth to his child.¹⁰

⁹ Alice Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), 120.

¹⁰ Pearson, *Mother Roots*, 161.

Bathsheba experienced an inordinate amount of grief and suffering in a short period of time. She slept with the king, found out she was pregnant, and sent word back to the king. The king had her husband murdered, she went through a brief grief period and she then was taken into the king's palace to be married to him. All in a matter of a few weeks or so.

Pastoral care professionals have indicated that people grieve differently. One could easily question if Bathsheba grieved the loss of her husband from a healthy perspective. The situation is magnified because not only did she lose her husband, but she married her husband's murderer all in such a short time. If she knew he had murdered her husband she must have been very afraid of him. To think of being married to a man who put a hit out on your husband is incomprehensible.

According to 2 Samuel 11:27, the text lets us know that God was displeased with what David had done. The Lord sent the prophet Nathan to give David a parable about a rich man taking a poor man's only sheep. David thought the story was true and was incensed by the callousness of the rich man only to find out the rich man represented himself and the poor man represented Uriah. God's pronouncement of punishment for David's sin was that the child Bathsheba was carrying would die.

Second Samuel 12: 15 states, "After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. Because of David's sin her baby became ill." Dealing with the illness of a baby is very devastating. Watching an innocent baby being sick is so traumatic and then losing that child must have been even more devastating. The text focuses on how David fasted and prayed during the child's illness, but it does not speak at all about what Bathsheba did while her baby was sick.

David pleaded with God for the child to live. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the floor. He refused to eat. The text does not indicate the actions of Bathsheba while the baby was sick. It is stated that David begged God not to take the baby's life, but it is not stated what Bathsheba was doing? He was her first child, we can only assume that she too must have pleaded with God for her child. We can only imagine that she held the baby close to her and attempted to nurse him hoping that he would live.

Insight is not given as to how she lamented the death of her child but it was Bathsheba who carried the baby in her womb. Bathsheba was the one who experienced the swelling of her stomach as the baby grew inside of it. It was Bathsheba who felt the first movements of her son stretching and moving around trying to find space to grow. It was Bathsheba who may have experienced morning sickness during those early months and labor pains as the child tried to enter into this world. However, only David's grief was articulated in the text.

The text tells us that David would not eat any food with his household (v. 18). On the seventh day, the child died. Everyone was afraid to tell David about the baby's death, but he knew the child had died by the way his servants were whispering. When he found out the baby was dead he cleaned himself up and went into the house of the Lord and worshiped God. Then he went home and ate.

Still the text does not tell us what happened to Bathsheba. How did she respond to the death of her first born after so recently losing her husband? Verse twenty-four – says, "Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her." Bathsheba grieved the loss of her son because the text says that David comforted his

wife. However, it does not tell us how he comforted her. How does she recover from such great losses in such a short time? Some biblical scholars make an assumption that once she moved into the palace and became the wife of the king that all is well but did she never have the time to adequately grieve the loss of her husband (Uriah) and her first born son? Could David have comforted his wife, by sleeping with her? Is sex a means of comfort to a woman who has lost so much in such a short time? We have to assume that Bathsheba must have gone on with her life, however, it is possible that she had unresolved issues of grief that she never had a chance to work through. Bathsheba experienced some very significant losses in a very short time. In less than one year she had lost her dignity, her husband and her child.

Grief is the inevitable response to significant loss; there is no loss without grief. It is possible, however, not to grieve. One may choose not to express the feelings that accompany loss. When that happens, grieving is delayed and the grief is “stored up,” with unfortunate consequences. Not that grieving is any more predictable than grief. It is a process that shows itself in many different forms. Some of them can be labeled healthy or unhealthy, normal or abnormal, but the most fruitful set of labels may be successful or unsuccessful. Because there are so many internal and external variables that impinge on grieving, it is rather risky to use a phrase such as “normal grieving.”¹¹

Many women who have had abortions have never had the opportunity to grieve the loss of their babies and just like Bathsheba may have done, they just had to live with the grief and go on with life. Many of them have been told, “Get over it! Life is better for you. You didn’t need that responsibility anyway. You’re much better off now.” The same thing was probably thought of about Bathsheba. She’s no longer married to Uriah, she is now married to the most powerful man in her world, King David. She’s much better off now but no one asked how she really felt. No one cared. Just like it does not matter what

¹¹ Kenneth Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 18.

women who have aborted their babies feel after it is all over. Did Bathsheba ever have a chance to cry about her husband or baby, or did she just have to be strong and suck it up? Grief unresolved is unhealthy grief.

New Testament

The New Testament scripture is taken from the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:4 “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.” This text was selected because of the focus on unresolved grief. The New Testament segment will illustrate through the word of God that even though Christians grieve they can still be blessed. So often during the process of grief or “mourning” there are times when the pain is so intense that we feel as if we have no hope. However, the New Testament scriptures direct us to the ability to hope in the Lord. We can be blessed even as we mourn.

The Bible tells us that God can still bless us even as we mourn. The author of the book of Matthew is unknown. Biblical scholars have debated over the authorship of Matthew. Some scholars believe that this book was written by Matthew, the tax collector, who Jesus called to be a disciple in Matthew 9:9 and later appointed as one of the twelve apostles in 10:3. While others assert that the author is unknown.

While it may be unlikely that the tax collector, Matthew, is the direct author of the Gospel, this does not rule out the possibility that this apostle had some traditional connection with the community from which the Gospel eventually emerged. If Matthew’s Gospel were written from Antioch in Syria, the community could have been in fairly close contact with Palestinian Judaism and the earliest traditions and personages of the Jesus movement. Accordingly, when using the term *Matthew* in connection with the evangelist and his perspective, the commentary is not referring to the apostle Matthew as such but to the anonymous author of the Gospel whose identity is no longer known to us except through the pages of his text.¹²

¹² Donald Senior, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 22.

As suggested above, Matthew wrote this Gospel to give his community members a reliable perspective or vantage point from which to understand the profound historical transition they were experiencing. That vantage point for Matthew was based on the community's faith in the person and teaching of Jesus. When all is said and done, the most fundamental characteristic of Matthew's Gospel is its robust Christology. From the opening lines of the Gospel Matthew affirms for his readers that Jesus is the promised Messiah or "Christ" sent by God to restore and renew Israel. The royal "Son of God," who enjoys extraordinary intimacy with God and reveals God's will. The "Son of Man" who suffers humiliation and rejection yet will come in glory to judge all peoples at the end of time. The "Savior" who takes away the sin and burdens of the people (a role revealed in the very name "Jesus"; see 1:21). The "authoritative teacher" greater than Moses whose interpretation of the law brings to fulfillment its God-intended purpose. The compassionate "Son of David" whose healing touch embodies and anticipates the reign of God. The "Emmanuel" or God-with-us who will abide with the community until the end of the age.¹³

Although the Gospels were not originally written to us, there is another, equally valid, sense in which it is true and important to say that they were written to us. The Gospels were all addressed to the church to help the Christian community understand clarity, and share its faith in Jesus as the Christ. . . The interpreter's task is not only to uncover the theology of the ancient writer in his terms, but to make it hearable in contemporary terms as well.¹⁴

In the fourth chapter of Matthew's gospel (the chapter that precedes our text) Jesus is led into the dessert to be tempted by the devil (vs. 2-11). In verse seventeen, he begins to preach "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near." Jesus then invites the first of his disciples to follow him (vs. 18-22). Following the calling and acceptance of the disciples, he then goes through the city of Galilee teaching in the synagogues. We also find him preaching and healing every sickness and disease among the people (vs. 23-24). Word spread about his ministry and the people brought him all who were ill and demon possessed and he healed them. (vs. 24). Large crowds began to follow him.

¹³ Senior, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, 26-27.

¹⁴ M. Eugene Boring, *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 8 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 118.

Chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel begins by telling us when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. Notice that his disciples came to him and he began to teach them. "Matthew carefully sets the stage for the discourse. The foregoing scene portrays the full impact of Jesus' redemptive mission, as crowds streamed to him from every quarter seeking and finding healing (4:23-25). The sight of the crowds prompts Jesus to ascend the mountain and sit down in the manner of a Jewish teacher to address his disciples."¹⁵

Jesus gives his keynote address on a mountain, although the exact location of the mountain is unknown. Israel's mountains are relatively small - - sometimes rough and certainly rocky, but more like what is often described as foothills. This particular spot no doubt provided a kind of small, natural amphitheater, a place where the speaker was easily visible and where the voice would carry without any amplification other than what the setting itself provided. Appropriately, it was a high place; not so high as to be inaccessible, but high enough that one felt psychologically lifted. The setting for the Sermon on the Mount is itself a kind of object lesson for the message given there. It is a mountain top experience, a lifelong call to go up higher.¹⁶

Jesus preaches to them what has been entitled the "Sermon on the Mount." His sermon begins with eight beatitudes.

Beatitude is a term derived from Latin *beatitude* – it means blessedness. Blessed is translated from both Hebrew and Greek words to refer to divine favor conveyed to man. Matthew's account, the advent of the kingdom has already commenced, indicated by the use of the present tense. It is addressed to the disciples particularly and is not a general proclamation. The sermon is set within two statements of Jesus: he has not come to destroy but to fulfil the Mosaic Law (Mt 5:17); and it is necessary to have a kind of righteousness that "exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees" (v 20). So these beatitudes are more concerned with the interior life of the disciple, to activate here and now the kind of life Jesus communicates in those who follow him. For Jesus has already inaugurated the kingdom. These eight beatitudes reflect on the traits of those who belong to that kingdom and who therefore reflect Christ's own life. The people and situations described may seem pitiable by human standards, but because of God's presence in their lives, they are actually blessed and should be congratulated and imitated.¹⁷

¹⁵ Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 67.

¹⁶ J. Ellsworth Kallas, *Beatitudes from the Back Side* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 13.

¹⁷ W. A. Elwell and B. J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 272.

Blessed Are Those

The focus will be on Matthew 5:4, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” The concept of a blessing was very important in the Ancient Near East; so much more than today. Today we use the term “God bless you” many times when someone sneezes. We tell people “bless you,” with no thought about what is being said. We have trivialized what it means to bestow a blessing on others by saying it with no real intent of blessing them.

In the Ancient Near East however, blessings were very important in the life of the faith community. They were so important that the father was intentional about bestowing blessings on his children prior to his death. Blessings were so important that Rebekah devised a plot to steal the blessings of one son to give to the other (see Gen. 27:5-30).

To “bless” meant to fill with benefits, either as an end in itself or to make the object blessed a source of further blessing for others. God is most often, at least, the understood agent of blessing in this sense, and blessing a person often amounted to calling on God to bless them. In another sense the word could mean to “praise,” as if filling the object of blessing with honor and good words. Thus individuals might bless God (Exod. 18:10; Ruth 4:14; Ps. 68:19; 103:1), while God also could bless men and women (Gen. 12:3; Num. 23:20; 1 Chron. 4:10; Ps. 109:28; Isa. 61:9). Persons might also bless one another (Gen. 27:33; Deut. 7:14; 1 Sam. 25:33), or they might bless things (Deut. 28:4; 1 Sam. 25:33; Prov. 5:18). Words of blessing could also be used as a salutation or greeting, similar to an invocation of “peace” (*shalom*, Gen. 48:20). As such it may be used in meeting (Gen. 47:7), departing (Gen. 24:60), by messengers (1 Sam. 25:14), in gratitude (Job 31:20), as a morning salutation (Prov. 27:14), congratulations for prosperity (Gen. 12:3), in homage (2 Sam. 14:22), and in friendliness (2 Sam. 21:3). To be blessed by God was considered the essential ingredient of a successful and satisfying life. A related word *’asher*, often translated “blessed” (Ps. 1:1 in KJV, RSV, etc.) refers especially to the state of happiness resulting from being blessed.¹⁸

In the New Testament community of faith blessings were also important. In the NT the word “blessed” often translates *makarios*, meaning “blessed, fortunate,

¹⁸ E. R. Clendenen, “Blessing and Cursing,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 223-224.

happy.” It occurs 50 times in the NT, most familiarly in the “beatitudes” in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3–11). Thus the NT concept stresses the joy people experience as children of God and citizens of the kingdom of God (Rom. 4:7–8; Rev. 1:3; 14:13).¹⁹

For the act of “blessing,” the NT generally used the verb *eulogeo*, whose etymology reflects the meaning “to speak well of” or “praise” (Luke 1:64). The related adjective *eulogetos* was especially used with this sense (Luke 1:68; Eph. 1:3). More often the verb refers to bestowing benefits (Gal. 3:9) or asking God to do so (Heb. 7:1). The noun *eulogia*, “blessing,” has a range of meaning similar to the verb (e.g., Rev. 5:12; James 3:10; Heb. 6:7).²⁰

In Matthew 5:1 when Jesus went on the mountain to draw away from the crowd to teach the disciples he began his sermon by teaching them, about those who are blessed.

Interestingly, the Lord taught them that those whom he called blessed were not the rich and famous or the beautiful people. Those who Christ claims to be blessed are not necessarily endowed with musical talent or artist ability. Those whom he calls blessed are not the highly intelligent or well educated, but the blessed are those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and those who are persecuted for righteousness. Those who Jesus is calling blessed hardly seem to be blessed in this world’s view. It all seems to be controversial in the eyes of this world. How are those that mourn blessed?

Those who are called “blessed” in these beatitudes are not fortunate, in any ordinary sense of the word. They may be poor, hungry and thirsty, mourning, persecuted – but they are none the less “blessed.” This is a blessedness which does not require ease and comfort; it is independent of circumstances. It is illumined by the assurance of a

¹⁹ Clendenen, “Blessing and Cursing,” 224.

²⁰ Clendenen, “Blessing and Cursing,” 224.

glorious future, of life in the kingdom of heaven which more than compensates for any present misfortunes. . . . The satisfactions promised to the blessed are not of their achieving; they are the gift of God.²¹

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

J. Elsworth Kalas in his book *Beatitudes from the Back Side* suggests that we look at the word “mourn” in more than one way. We generally think of mourning only as relating to death but he also suggests that we mourn in ways other than over the loss of a loved one. He suggests that we can also mourn over our sins.²² *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defines mourning as an expression of grief at a time of bereavement or repentance, often accompanied by weeping, tearing of clothes and wearing sackcloth.²³

Consider that Jesus began his ministry with the same message as John the Baptist: “Repent!” The basic quality of repentance is a sense of profound sorrow for the wrong we have done, along with a passion to turn life in a different direction. John Wesley, the father of the Methodist movement, felt that this beatitude was primarily concerned with repentance. He said that those who wished to receive the blessings of God’s comfort would need to mourn either for their own sins or for other men’s and be steadily and habitually serious in this concern.²⁴

Kalas suggests that we consider that we may mourn because we are sorrowful for those sins we have committed. Interestingly, repentance is not generally connected to mourning. However, repentance can definitely be associated with mourning. Repentance can definitely be associated with mourning. There are persons who mourn over the sins

²¹ Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1981), 125.

²² Kalas, *Beatitudes from the Back Side*, 27.

²³ M. H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London, UK: Martin Manser, 2009).

²⁴ Kalas, *Beatitudes from the Back Side*, 27.

they have committed, not because of the repercussions that may affect them, but as they mature spiritually they become conscious of how their actions affect others. To reach a point where you are no longer so concerned about yourself, but also how your actions have a direct impact on others, that in itself a blessing. Mourning over one's sins can cause persons to repent and desire for their lives to be changed. Blessed are those who mourn.

Testimonies have been given from people (especially those who grew up in the south) who indicated that they accepted Jesus Christ during a revival at a church when they sat on the "Mourner's Bench." The Mourner's Bench is a pew or bench located in the front of the church that has been set aside for persons who are sorrowful and really want to change their lives. When the revivalist calls for those who want to sit on the Mourners Bench, people actually come forward and sit on that pew to hear the message of salvation. By coming to sit on the bench, they are acknowledging that they are sinners and want to repent of their sins. The Mourner's Bench is there for them to outwardly admit that they are sorrowful for their sins and to ask God for forgiveness. Many persons have testified that their lives were changed on the Mourner's Bench. Their sorrow and desire to repent changed their life. Mourning can be related to repentance for our sins.

We cannot talk about mourning without including those who have suffered a significant loss. Though that loss is not always pertaining to physical death. We can mourn the loss of a loved one through death; or we can mourn the loss of a loved one through divorce (or some other broken relationship). We can mourn the loss of a job or a career (being terminated from a job or being forced to retire). We can also mourn the loss of a loved one through illness such as Alzheimer's or some other debilitating disease.

There are many ways in which we can mourn losses. However, in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He promises that those that mourn will be comforted. Not that they may, but they will be comforted.

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn for They Will Be Comforted

Though we may mourn because of our transgressions or we may mourn a great loss, this text reminds us that we are able to find comfort. *The Dictionary of Bible Themes* defines the word comfort as: "The consolation and reassurance of those who are in distress, anxiety or need. Such comfort is an essential aspect of human relationships. Scripture declares that God comforts his people in times of distress." Fortis is the Latin word for strength . . . When someone comforts us, they are quite literally coming to us with strength. Someone coming to us with a transfusion of strength.²⁵

In light of that definition we come to realize when someone comforts us they bring strength to us. When persons comfort us they strengthen us and when God comforts us, God strengthens us. The following are some ways in which we can be comforted when we mourn. Dr. Richard North in his study on ending life well, indicated that persons suffering with Alzheimer's, will sometimes forget who their loved ones are, but they may hear the Lord's Prayer or a hymn of the church and their whole demeanor changes. When this occurs, though their family members may be mourning the loss of the persons they once knew, they can find strength in knowing that they have not forgotten about God. Nor has God forgotten about them.

Another way a person can strengthen us when they comfort us is by sharing their testimonies about how God brought them through a situation similar to what we are currently going through. The women who participate in the project will be able to

²⁵ Kalas, *Beatitudes from the Back Side*, 27.

experience comfort and be strengthened by the other women's testimonies about how God healed and delivered them.

The Sermon on the Mount concludes "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law." He began in Matthew 5:1 teaching his disciples but by the time he ends this long sermon in chapter seven, the crowds were amazed at his teaching which means that those crowds, mentioned in 5:1, somehow got a chance to hear him preach even though he started out speaking only to the disciples. J. Ellsworth Kalas said: "Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, and now Jesus gives what might be called his keynote address on a mountain."²⁶ "The severity of the law was first given by Moses on the mountain, but the people were forbidden to draw close. Now with Jesus all are invited to draw near to him to hear of the gift of the gospel."²⁷

His impression was that the disciples were gathered close to our Lord just as you might expect them to be, not only because the disciples would insist on being close but also because the crowds would make a way for Jesus' students and the crowds stayed close enough to listen in. He continued by saying:

Some were probably bored and left before the sermon was over - - especially since many in the crowd were standing, which made exiting easy. Others were impressed, but without much follow through...Some said he was a fascinating teacher, and for a while they came to hear him often, and urged others to do so, too. And some said, "Never have I heard anyone speak like this man, and they could not bear to leave him."²⁸

²⁶ Kalas, *Beatitudes from the Back Side*, 13.

²⁷ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1984), 84.

²⁸ Kalas, *Beatitudes from the Back Side*, 15.

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn, For They Will Be Comforted

In his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul writes “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; the father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God,” 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.

God will comfort us in our own mourning when we bear each other’s burdens or share in each other’s pain. As followers of Christ we should show compassion and allow ourselves to hurt with each other. When we can share in each other’s pain, we can (ourselves) be comforted. In bringing comfort to others we are blessed. Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted by the God of all comfort. When we are comforted by the God of all comfort, we can reach back and comfort and strengthen someone else.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

There is a wealth of knowledge that relates to abortion, specifically on pro-life and pro-choice issues. The research was concerned with whether one should or should not be allowed to have an abortion. The purpose for reflecting on the historical component of abortion is not to deal with whether abortion is a sin, or should be acceptable. It is not to try to persuade persons to have, or not have an abortion. The research interest is grounded in whether the aftermath of abortion can be spiritually and psychologically unhealthy for some (not all) women and how the ecclesia may be able to address a subject that the church does not dare talk about.

The fact that the topic of abortion is not discussed in churches is a direct indication that there is a need to address the effects and impacts of those women who have undergone an abortion. Many in the congregations are suffering silently and are not sure how to handle the distress of their actions. Further there is a taboo that is attached with the actions and many feel as though forgiveness should not be an option because the pain was self-inflicted. Fortunately, the thought process of God is not consistent with that of man.

In conducting research, the more things change, the more they stay the same rings true for this subject matter as well. Two thousand years ago women did not have a voice

much in what could be done with their bodies and today legislature is still being pushed to assure that those same rights are being violated.

Abortions were practiced in ancient Greece and Rome and quite interesting in antiquity concerns about abortion were rare because the fetus was not considered a human. Concerns were more for the health and welfare of the mother and the father. The earliest days of ancient Greece and Rome to the time of Augustine, abortion was practiced frequently by pagans and occasionally by Jews and Christians. It seems to have been more common among the wealthy than among the poor. . . But the poor aborted too as did married and unmarried chaste and prostitutes.¹

Motives for obtaining an abortion were no less varied in antiquity than they are today. By far the most frequent reason was to conceal illicit sexual activity. Rich women did not want to share their wealth with lower-class children fathered illegitimately. Another reason was to preserve “sex appeal,” for many women especially, the rich, did not enjoy the effects of pregnancy on their figures preferring to “get big and trouble the womb with bouncing babes.”²

According to Michael Gorman in his book *Abortion and the Early Church*, some women in antiquity took oral drugs (poisons) to cause a spontaneous abortion. Additionally, mixtures of herbs and alcohol would also be used to cause the fetus to expel from the womb. Taking those drugs could put both the mother and fetus in danger.³

Mechanical abortion techniques were often used instead of or as supplements to drugs. The crudest method, used most often by (probably desperate) women themselves, was to bind the body tightly around the womb or to strike it so as to expel the fetus. Another method required the use of abortive instruments. Two of these instruments were described by Tertullian. The first was a “copper needle or spike” such as those possessed by Hippocrates. . . The second tool, more sophisticated but very dangerous, required a delicate surgical operation.”⁴

Both Plato and Aristotle recommended family limitation by abortion (if necessary), and the declines in population of the Roman Empire at the time of Augustus and again after Hadrian were probably due in part to such action by

¹ Michael Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church, Christian, Jewish and Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1982), 14.

² Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 13.

³ Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 14.

⁴ Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 16.

both rich and poor. The wealthy did not want to share their estates with many offspring, while the poor were unable to support large families. Justinian's Digest mentions a woman who aborted after a divorce in order not to have a child by the man she then hated. Abortion was also a corrective to the many ineffective means of contraception.⁵

After the "Christianization" of the Roman Empire under Constantine (313), the practice of abortion undoubtedly increased in the church. According to Epiphanius of Cyprus (ca 315-403), pagan influence was directly responsible for increased use by Christians of contraception, and when that failed, abortion. . . During the fourth and early fifth centuries the first ecclesiastical laws against abortion were passed, and five major church Fathers - - Basil, Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine and Chrysostom - - commented on the practice

The Council of Elvira, in about 305 was the first Christian body to endorse that women be punished for having abortions. Some of the punishments were: If a woman commits adultery and becomes pregnant and has an abortion, she will not be able to receive communion until she dies. If a woman should become pregnant in an adulterous relationship and has an abortion she cannot be baptized until she is dying. Striking a slave who dies accidentally or on purpose only required that communion be withheld for a prescribed period of time. Therefore, it seemed as if abortion was a more serious offense than the killing of a slave.⁶

In 314, another council of bishops met at Ancyra, capital of Galatia in Asia Minor. This council was geographically wider in scope than Elvira, including the churches in Asia Minor and Syria. . . The council wrote concerning infanticide and abortion: Canon 21: Women who prostitute themselves, and who kill the children thus begotten, or who try to destroy them when in their wombs, are by ancient law excommunicated to the end of their lives. We however, have softened their punishment and condemned them to the various appointed degrees of penance for ten years.⁷

Augustine gave more attention to the topic of abortion than any of the fathers of the church. He believed that the purpose for sexual intercourse was procreation. He also believed that using contraceptive and sterilizing drugs were sins because they hinder a

⁵ Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 15.

⁶ Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 65.

⁷ Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 63.

couple from the primary purpose of marriage which is to have children. He believed in the sanctity of life as being a blessing from God and that life began during conception.

Despite his connection between sterilization or contraception and abortion, Augustine's position on abortion was not based solely on his theology of marriage. . . He reconsiders the logical consequences of his doctrines of the soul and of original sin. When does a fetus become human? If it is aborted, will it be damned?. . . Faced with human inability to ascertain when the fetus begins to live, Augustine chose to emphasize the value of all life, whether actual or potential.⁸

By the end of the second century, Christians believed that the primary purpose for a man and woman to get married and the only reasons for couples to engage in sex was to have children. They did not believe that people should have sex for pleasure so there was no reason for couples to use contraceptives. They believed that since sex was only for procreation, the best way for a Christian to live if they did not want to have children was to practice celibacy, even if they were married.

In the book the *Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of Religious Right*, the author stated that before modern medical technology women had no way of knowing if she was pregnant until she felt movement from the fetus (quickening). Therefore, when a woman's menstrual cycle was irregular or late for some other reason, she would have to resort to medicine to attempt to encourage her menstrual flow. Because there was no way for a woman to know if she was pregnant or not, she could not receive an abortion until she felt movement of the fetus, which does not occur sometimes until the second trimester.

Between 1450 and 1750, church teaching generally held to the allowance of abortion before quickening and also allowed it after quickening to save the woman's life. The eighteenth-century Catholic theologian Sanchez also held that abortion was acceptable in cases of rape of a single woman whose family would kill her for having become pregnant, and a woman "betrothed to another." Pope

⁸ Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 62.

Gregory XIII, who led the church from 1572 to 1585, allowed it in the first forty days of pregnancy and for single women under extenuating circumstances.⁹

If the rule that abortion was accepted in cases of rape, I question how many innocent men were accused of rape because of this policy. Abortion was also acceptable for single women whose family would kill her for being pregnant? Women were also permitted to have an abortion if she was engaged to someone other than the father of her unborn.

In 1869 excommunication was declared the punishment for performing an abortion, the ban of abortion was expanded in 1895 even to save the woman's life, and in 1917 excommunication was extended to include women. In 1902 the ban was extended to include ectopic pregnancies, and 1931 saw promulgation of a church law banning abortion under any circumstance. Exceptions were allowed in practice, however, where saving the woman's life resulted in the death of the fetus indirectly, as in ectopic pregnancies and cases of uterine cancer. Essentially, abortion of the fetus could not be directly intended, even when the pregnancy threatened the woman's health.¹⁰ "The first abortion law in the United States passed in Connecticut in 1821, made abortion illegal only after quickening and seems to have been aimed not at abortion itself but at the use of poisons as abortifacient, which put the life of the woman at risk. By 1841 ten states had passed laws regulating abortion."¹¹ Abortions were at that time performed by midwives and herbalist who mixed poisonous concoctions to be given to women to expel the fetuses. The majority of the women seeking abortions during that time were unmarried.

⁹ Dallas Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right – From Polite to Fiery Protest* (New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 58.

¹⁰ Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement*, 60.

¹¹ Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement*, 60.

The American Medical Association was formed in 1847 with a primary responsibility to regulate professional standards of physicians and to make it illegal for persons who were not doctors to perform abortions. Their campaign against abortion was due to the moral belief of many of their constituents that women should remain chaste.

Medical practitioners also sought to limit the growth of immigrants and nonwhite Protestant populations. Involuntary sterilization was practiced on at least 45,000 persons between 1907 and 1945.¹²

Another force behind the drive to make abortion illegal arose from a combination of social factors in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The industrialization and urbanization of the United States was beginning in earnest. The two trends initiated other changes that may have encouraged the use of abortion. By 1840 there appeared a decline in the birth rate; between 1810 and 1890 it was cut in half. By the 1850s it became clear that those having abortions also included more and more middle-and upper-class married white Protestant females. Second, women especially young single women, were increasingly being employed outside the home in wage-earning positions. Finally, educational achievement was becoming more important for both sexes. The public school movement arose about mid-nineteenth century at least partially to provide better trained workers for the newly industrialized work place. A college education was becoming a prerequisite for entrance into the professions of law, medicine, and the clergy; apprenticeship was on its way out.¹³

In light of the above, quality of life became an important issue. Not just the quality of the life of the newborn, but the quality of the life of those who were members of the family. Quality of life referred to young single women being unable to care for their children without the support of a husband. Quality of life also referred to the challenges of raising handicapped children. In many instances, to minimize hardship on the family, doctors would intentionally allow severely handicapped newborns to die by not providing them with adequate care that would keep them alive.

¹² Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement*, 64.

¹³ Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement*, 72.

Dallas Blanchard in his book *The Anti-Abortion Movement* wrote that in 1871 the AMA sponsored a study that indicated that approximately 1 million women were having abortions annually in the United States. If the study was accurate, the numbers of women who had abortions back then and who are having abortions now are equal.

The Guttmacher Institute indicated that in 2011, 1.1 million American women obtained abortions, producing a rate of 16.9 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age.¹⁴

By 1890 every state had laws regulating and outlawing some types of abortion, with most of the predominantly Catholic states, such as Connecticut and Massachusetts, following the Vatican policy, including the outlawing of the dissemination of birth control. As state laws evolved over the next century, disparities arose among them. Some allowed abortion only to save the woman's life. Others allowed it if the pregnancy and or delivery threatened her physical health. Still others broadened the definition of health to include mental health. Most states allowed abortion for victims of rape or incest.¹⁵

In the early 20s the use of birth control and contraceptives was highly encouraged and women were sterilized involuntarily especially those who were considered "flawed" such as retarded women or African Americans. Steps were also put in place to minimize governmental assistance programs to poor and minority females.

While individual state laws differed in their comprehensiveness, by 1970 abortion became the only medical procedure in the United States generally requiring various combinations of (1) clearance by a panel of physicians rather than only the individual practitioner, (2) clearance by a psychiatrist (3) a length of residence in a particular state by the woman seeking the abortion, usually six months, (4)

¹⁴ Guttmacher, "State Facts about Abortion," accessed May 13, 2015, <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/sfaa/illinois.html>.

¹⁵ Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement*, 102.

the consent of someone other than the patient, normally her husband or parent, and (5) a unique definition of “informed consent.”¹⁶

With the abovementioned clearance requirements many women could not maneuver through the red tape to obtain a legal abortion; especially poor and minority women. Those abortions that were given to the women who passed scrutiny of those five conditions were middle and upper class women. Women who were poor and minority found themselves seeking back alley, illegal abortions and were forced to paying exorbitantly more than their more affluent counterparts along with taking the risk of an unsafe procedure.

In the 1960s, abortion rights advocacy was spurred by two events that received widespread coverage by the media. First, the results of the use of thalidomide by pregnant women became known. Use of the drug seemed at first to be largely a concern in Europe where the birth of more than 8,000 deformed babies were blamed on thalidomide. It became an American issue when Sherri Finkbine, a two months pregnant Arizona woman, discovered she had taken thalidomide and sought an abortion. Although she had secured the approval of her physician and her hospital, both withdrew their consent in the wake of the publicity surrounding the case; Arizona law permitted abortion only to save the mother’s life. Finkbine ultimately went to Sweden for an abortion, but her situation had brought abortion and the state’s restriction laws to national attention.¹⁷

The following is a chronological table abortion politics illustrates how politics has affected abortion:

Late 1940s – early 1950s - Experts estimate 200,000 to 1.3 million illegal abortions in United States annually. Rise of hospital abortion boards, formed to adjudicate women’s appeals for permission to obtain legal “therapeutic abortions.”

1953 Alfred Kinsey’s *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* reports that 9 out of 10 premarital pregnancies end in abortion and 22 percent of married women have had an abortion while married.

¹⁶ Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement*, 102.

¹⁷ Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement*, 123.

1955 Mary S. Calderone, medical director of Planned Parenthood, organizes high-profile conference, "Abortion in America"; conference volume published in 1958.

1960 American Medical Association observes that laws against abortion are unenforceable.

1962 In highly publicized incident, Sherri Finkbine, denied an abortion in Phoenix, goes to Stockholm to abort a fetus damaged by thalidomide; according to Gallup Poll, 52 percent of Americans approved. In California, Pat Maginnis founds women's-rights based Citizens for Humane Abortion Laws.

1965 New York Times endorses abortion law reform, February 13. Rubella epidemic leads to abortions performed on grounds of "mental health crisis." *Griswold v. Connecticut* Supreme Court rules, 7-2, that Connecticut law banning contraception infringes on married couples' right to privacy.

Mid – 1960s

1966 Abortion law repeal (vs. reform) efforts gain momentum. Association to Repeal Abortion Laws in California started.

1967 Journal of the American Medical Association prints pro-reform editorial. Abortion reform bills considered by at least 25 state legislatures. Colorado enacts ALI-style abortion reform law, followed by North Carolina and California. Twenty-one New York clergymen establish Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion, an abortion referral network. Federal government spends over \$20 million a year on contraceptive programs in United States. *Modern Medicine* magazine reports 87 percent of American physicians favor liberalization of country's anti-abortion policies.

1969 Jane an underground abortion services network, formed in Chicago. First National Conference on Abortion Laws held; National Association for Repeal of Abortions Laws (NARAL) founded there. Radical feminist group Redstockings holds first speak-out on abortion.

1970 New York state legislature legalizes abortion; Hawaii and Washington follow.

1971 National poll shows that over half of Americans favor legalizing abortion. American Bar Association official support a woman's right to choose abortion up to 20th week of pregnancy. Supreme Court hears first round of oral arguments in *Roe v. Wade*. *Abele v. Markle* filed in Connecticut; 858 plaintiffs. Dr. Jane Hodgson convicted for performing in-hospital abortion only U.S. physician ever convicted for this reason. Feminist Women's Health Center set up in Los Angeles; teaches women how to perform "menstrual extractions."

1972 Connecticut's abortion law declared unconstitutional; Meskill bill reinstates law; Women versus Connecticut files new suit with 2,000 plaintiffs.

1973 Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision legalizes abortion, as does its ruling in companion case, Doe v. Bolton.* NARAL becomes National Abortion Rights Action League in response to anti-Roe backlash. First edition of National Right to Life Committee's newsletter editorializes. "We must work for the passage of a constitutional Human Life Amendment," Religions Coalition for Abortion Rights Founded.

1975 National Women's Health Network founded.

1976 Hyde Amendment enacted prohibiting Medicaid-funded abortions except "where the life of the mother would be endangered."

1980 Republican Party platform calls for appointment of anti-abortion-rights judges at every level of the federal judiciary. In Harris v. McRae Supreme Court rules that although the government "May not place obstacles in the paths of a woman's exercise of her freedom of choice, it need not remove those not of its own creation. Indigence falls within the latter category."

1983 National Black Women's Health Project founded.

1985 Women of Color Partnership Program created by Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights.

1987 Reproductive Health Technologies Project founded. Randall Terry leads first "rescue." In Bowen v. Kendrick Supreme Court upholds Adolescent Family Life Act's denial of funding to programs that "advocate, promote, or encourage abortion."

1989 In Webster v. Reproductive Health Services Supreme Court upholds Missouri law stating "human life begins at conception" and placing restrictions on access to abortion; Court comes within one vote of overturning Roe v. Wade. Teenager Becky Bell, afraid to obey parental-notification statute dies after septic illegal abortion.

1989-1992 Over 700 anti-abortion-rights bills introduced in state legislatures across the country.

Late 1980s – early 1990s Anti-abortion violence aimed at abortion clinics escalates.

1990 In Hodgson v. Minnesota Supreme Court upholds state law that no abortion should be performed on a minor woman for 48 hours after both parents are notified; statute also provides for "judicial by-pass."

1991 RU486 approved for use in Britain Operation Rescue stages massive blockades throughout summer in Wichita, Kansas. In *Rust v. Sullivan* Supreme Court rules 5-4 that since the government had not discriminated on the basis of viewpoint, but had “merely chosen to fund one activity [childbirth] to the exclusion of another [abortion], the ‘gag rule’ prohibiting physicians and other employees of abortion-providing facilities from counseling pregnant women about abortion or engaging in activities that encourage, promote, or advocate abortion as a method of family planning did not violate the free-speech rights of doctors, their staffs, or their patients. National Network of Abortion Funds established. Eighty-four percent of counties in United States have no physician willing to perform abortions. In *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* Supreme Court rules, 5-4, to “retain and reaffirm” women’s right to abortion but also upholds Pennsylvania restrictions. In wake of Casey decision, Mississippi becomes first state to introduce a mandatory delay and biased-information requirement.

1993 NARAL changes name to National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League. National Black Women’s Health Project takes lead in fight against Hyde Amendment. Dr. David Gunn, an abortion practitioner, murdered in Florida. Congress expands Hyde Amendment to provide federal funding for abortions in cases of rape and incest.

1994 Supreme Court rules RICO may be used to prosecute perpetrators of abortion clinic violence. FACE Act passed, restricting protest activity near clinic entrances. After circulating his “justifiable homicide” petition, Paul Hill murders abortion provider Dr. John Britton and his volunteer escort, James Barrett in Florida; Dr. Gary Romalis shot at his home in British Columbia. Republicans attain majority in Congress; move quickly to bar health-insurance coverage of abortion for federal employees, outlaw use of U.S. military hospital for abortions, ban federal funding of abortions for federal prisoners, and abolish federal subsidies for international family-planning agencies that provide abortions or abortion-related information. Attorney General Janet Reno convenes grand jury to investigate clinic violence. Medical Students for Choice founded.

1995 Two clinic employees, Shannon Lowney and Leanne Nichols murdered in Brookline, Massachusetts. Ohio bans abortion carried out dilation and extraction method (“partial birth abortions”).

1996 Both houses of Congress take the unprecedented step of passing a bill that criminalizes the performance of abortion by a specific method, so-called partial birth abortions. Legislation is vetoed by President Clinton and efforts to override veto fail; however, Congress and state legislatures continue attempts to ban this infrequently used method, properly called intact dilation and extraction. FDA

issues letter finding RU486 “approvable,” but subsequent business and legal complications render U.S. distribution plans unclear.¹⁸

Roe versus Wade resulted from the efforts of a Texas woman, who claimed she had been raped while working in Georgia with a circus, to obtain an abortion. Norma McCorvey, the Roe of the case, later went public to support the 1973 decision. As the case traveled through the Texas state courts to the U.S. Supreme Court, much time passed and McCorvey’s pregnancy proceeded. She eventually decided to have the baby, and so the question of abortion for her as an individual became moot. The issues her case raised, of course, remain significant today.¹⁹

In Roe versus, Wade the Supreme Court decided that during the first trimester the state could not control abortion in any way. During the second trimester, the state could only control the abortion only if it was unhealthy for the fetus or the mother, and in the third trimester the state could completely control the abortion if the fetus was viable in order to protect the fetus.

Doe versus Bolton, decided at the same time as Roe versus Wade, arose from Georgia. Doe’s real name was never made public, so little is known of her personal circumstances, but the court used Doe to detail what kinds of regulations the state could not use in controlling abortions. For example, the Doe decision “struck down” hospital licensing requirements, a residency requirement, and a requirement that two physicians certify a woman’s need to undergo an abortion.²⁰

¹⁸ Rickie Solinger, *Abortion Wars Half Century of Struggle 1950-2000* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 57.

¹⁹ Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement*, 125.

²⁰ Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement*, 132.

According to the Guttmacher Institute report in 1992, the court upheld the basic right to abortion in *Planned Parenthood versus Casey*. However, it also expanded the ability of the states to enact all but the most extreme restrictions on women's access to abortion. The most common restrictions in effect are parental notification or consent requirements for minors, limitations on public funding, and unnecessary and overly burdensome regulations on abortion facilities.

In reflecting on the history of abortion, the question becomes: does abortion adversely affect women? The arguments for and against this are as numerous as pro-life and pro-choice debates. The conclusion of this chapter provides various points of view regarding this matter. According to statistical information provided by the Guttmacher Institute, over one million women have abortions in the United States annually. Of those women, many of them experience depression and grief that has never been resolved.

The Politics of Abortion Trauma

Prior to the 1960s investigations of the psychological effects of abortion concluded almost without exception that abortion inevitably causes trauma, posing a severe threat to psychological health . . . By the late 60s, when the fear of the population explosion was at its peak and "free love" and feminism were on the rise, the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association reversed their prior suppositions in opposition to abortion. Citing the new body of research purported to prove that abortion was safe, the AMA and both APAs actively supported the repeal of anti-abortion laws. In the late 1970s however, a few women had experienced emotional or physical problems after abortion banned together under the name Women Exploited. This effort did not have a national impact until 1982, however when Nancyjo Mann started a group called Women Exploited by Abortion (WEBA), which offered group and peer counseling programs.²¹

Mann had been severely traumatized by a second-trimester saline abortion in 1974, during which she delivered her perfectly-formed daughter into her own hands. After four years of substance abuse, sleep disorders, sexual dysfunctions,

²¹ Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 269-270.

broken relationships, risk-taking and suicidal behavior, she found a measure of peace in a religious conversion. After another four years she felt drawn to reach out to other women whom she believed were suffering as she had. She began public speaking and within a year, WEBA had thousands of members with chapters in all fifty states. In 1981 family psychotherapist Vincent Rue was the first to attempt a systematic definition of post-abortion syndrome (PAS) as a variant of PTSD. He was almost immediately threatened with legal action by the general counsel of the American Psychiatric Association if any notes he published making reference to the PTSD diagnosis for abortion did not include a specific disclaimer stating that the APA denies that there is “any clinical evidence for the basis of the diagnosis of “post-abortion syndrome.”²²

By the early eighties, however, pro-life organizations were providing a platform for post-abortive women and counselors to speak publicly about the emotional aftermath of abortion. The term “post-abortion syndrome” or PAS, first presented in Congressional hearings in 1981 by Rue, slowly began to be used in pro-life circles to describe any negative reactions to abortion, and is now even used in the public media.²³

In conclusion, there are some women and men who suffer from Post-Abortion Syndrome and are in need of assistance. Additionally, not every woman is affected by post abortion stress. There are some women and men who are relieved that they were not required to bring a child into the world that they did not want at the time. One of the goals of the research project is to help bring healing through a ministry project to those who desire to find healing.

²² Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 270.

²³ Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 272.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Liberation Theology, Womanist Theology and Confessional Theology will be discussed throughout this chapter. These three have been selected because they will help in the healing of women who had abortions and have not had the opportunity to heal, because no one has given them the opportunity to grieve and because they have never been given a voice to tell their stories and or have not been provided with biblical stories they can relate to or they can see themselves in.

All too often women, especially African American women, who have experienced abortion, end up suffering needlessly because of the secrets, shame and guilt associated with the sin of abortion preached, taught, and lived out in many faith institutions. This is not how God intended women who have chosen abortion as an alternative to carrying a fetus full term to live the rest of their lives. These women need to know God is always present in their lives to hear their cries, heal their wounds, and release them from the captivity and oppression that hinders them from living the abundant life.

During a women's Bible study one evening on the subject forgiveness, one of the members (a middle-aged woman) said, "I can never ask God to forgive me for something I knew was wrong. I had two abortions when I was young and I knew what I was doing. You can't ask for forgiveness when you know what you were doing is wrong." Her teacher (a female minister) sat there flabbergasted and did not know how to respond to

her statement. This is an excellent example which indicates that the church does not know how to respond and furthermore, the church is not trained to respond. Maybe some ministers have preached from the pulpit that the Bible tells us “Thou shalt not kill.” Therefore, women should not have abortions. Or we may hear the church take sides of the argument that they are either pro-life or pro-choice.

However, the time has come to change the subject from whether or not one should have an abortion to, how do we minister to the millions of women who have had abortions and have kept it a secret because they are ashamed of being judged; or they believe they cannot ask for forgiveness because they “knew what they were doing.” The question is, how do we create safe places for women to tell and retell their stories so they can be liberated from the secret, shame and guilt they have carried around for many years?

On this explorative journey, it has been stated repeatedly, “You must address your secrets before you can be healed.” The late Dr. Emma Justes addresses keeping secrets in her book *Please Don't Tell*. In her book, Dr. Justes discusses how secrets are often passed from generation to generation and how damaging they can be. She indicated that the secret itself is not the problem as much as the damaging effects of the secret. The whole premise is once a secret is shared it no longer has the destructive power over you it once had. Secrets have a hidden power over us because those who keep secrets live in the fear that their secret may one day come out and shame them or spoil their “good name.” However, secrets have no power over you once they are shared. Once a secret is shared you never have to worry about someone finding out.¹

¹ Emma Justes, *Please Don't Tell: What to Do with the Secrets People Share* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014).

Many women who had abortions have kept that secret for many years. Abortions can be swept under the rug and no one will ever have to know what happened. In fact, the primary reason women have abortions is so no one will know they were ever pregnant.

Women have abortions for many different reasons. Some of them are: (1) They are married and had a relationship outside of the marriage and got pregnant. (2) They are very young and feel that they cannot take care of a child. (3) They have been raped. (4) They are unmarried. (5) They are in an uncommitted relationship and their partner is not in favor of having a child. (6) Or they already have children and do not feel that they can take care of another one.

In a conversation with one woman on the subject of abortion she stated, “You would be surprised at the number of women who are sitting in church every Sunday who have had abortions and are suffering in silence. I had an abortion and I remember every time something bad happened to me I thought God was punishing me for murdering my child.” Another woman said, “I had an abortion when I was a young woman, and now I’ve never had any children. I have often wondered if God didn’t let me have any more children because he punished me for having the abortion.” It is not God’s intention that women should suffer because of their choice. God is a God of liberation, healing, and grace and not one who would desire that women live their lives in secret, shame and guilt, not receiving the forgiveness of others or not forgiving self. When we see how prevalent shame-held secrets are, and the pain with which they are held, we recognize the havoc these secrets create in the lives of individuals and families. Even church

communities are not immune. “Kept secrets can deeply and negatively affect all the people they touch.”²

This project is designed to encourage women to share their secrets in hopes of beginning a process of healing, forgiveness and restoration.

Change, as it always does, will mean loss (as well as potential gain) in the secret keeper’s life. . . When secret keepers recognize the presence of the boundless love of God that we find represented by the father in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), telling becomes possible. Secret keepers see hope as what they can imagine on the other side of telling, instead of the loss, judgment, and rejection they have anticipated.³

According to a brochure entitled “Abortion Facts and Figures” published in 2001, the World Health Organization estimates that worldwide forty-two million induced abortions are performed each year. In light of those numbers it would be safe to say that annually millions of women have abortions and many of them have no place to go for healing if they are in need of it and are members of local Christian congregations. Many of them are suffering in silence and have not been given a voice to tell their stories or an avenue for them to find forgiveness and healing. Additionally, some women in the Roman Catholic Church have attempted to be forgiven by their priests by confessing to having an abortion and were not granted forgiveness by their priest.

In a Nov 16, 2016, New York Times article it was stated that Pope Francis extended priests the ability to forgive abortion. Prior to the pope giving the priests this authority, bishops and special confessors were the only people who were able to extend absolution for abortion.

Under canon law, abortion brings automatic excommunication unless the person receiving or performing it confesses and receives absolution. Abortion is

² Justes, *Please Don't Tell*, 4.

³ Justes, *Please Don't Tell*, 10.

considered a “reserved sin,” meaning that permission to grant forgiveness usually must come from a bishop. Bishops could already delegate the authority to grant absolution to parish priests - - and many bishops in the United States had done so - - but the practice varied widely by country and even by diocese. In parts of the world, observant Catholics who have sought absolution for abortions have faced delays at times, or even rejection.⁴

A post-abortive Catholic woman expressed the horror of going to a priest for confession many years ago. When she confessed what she had done, the priest yelled at her and called her a murderer. No wonder women are reluctant to share their secrets to some who are in spiritual authority over them. How devastating it must have been for her to finally gain enough courage to confess her secret only to be humiliated by her spiritual leader whom she had hoped would be able to help her find forgiveness from God.

The black church has always been the way to find liberation from oppression and oppressors. Many men or women found hope in the black church when there was no other way. The church has been there for African Americans when we could not find our way. The hymns of the church have also kept us when we could not keep ourselves. Black celebrative preaching provides redemptive stories that have been told, retold and articulated in ways that can bring us out of the darkness into the marvelous light. Yet, it was the theologies of Black Liberation as well as Womanist Theology that really sets the framework for the theological chapter. This chapter will speak to the theology of James Cone, Dwight Hopkins, as well as, a reflection on Womanist Theology in general as paths toward the liberation of women who had abortion and are in need of healing.

The three theological disciplines I have selected to investigate are Liberation, Womanist and Confessional. Liberation because I believe knowing God as liberator will

⁴ Elisabetta Povoledo and Liam Stack, “Pope Francis Extends Priest’ Ability to Forgive Abortion,” *NY Times*, accessed November 21, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/world/europe/pope-francis-abortion-priest.html?_r=0.

help to bring healing to persons impacted by abortion. Womanist because I believe women can empower each other by supporting each other; hearing biblical narratives that focus on Jesus a liberator of women and listening to each other's stories. And Confessional because confessing and being transparent to each other brings healing in and of itself.

Liberation Theologians

Dr. James Cone is Union Theological Seminary's Bill and Judith Meyers Professor of Systematic Theology and the founder of black liberation theology. He has authored 12 books and numerous articles which have been translated into nine different languages. His most recent book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* was labeled Amazon.com's number one best seller in religion in February 2012.⁵ Some of Dr. Cone's earliest theological writings were informed by Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He is an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Dr. Dwight Hopkins (according to the University of Chicago website) teaches theology at the University of Chicago School of Divinity. He has authored numerous books and articles on Liberation Theology and was awarded the Professor Extraordinary in the Department of Philosophy, Practical and Systematic Theology at the University of South Africa in Pretoria, South Africa. He earned his B.A. at Harvard University and holds two Ph. D's. One from Union Theological Seminary and the second

⁵ UTS NYC, "James H. Cone," accessed October 17, 2017, <http://Utsnyc.edu/faculty/james-h-cone>.

from the University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa. Dwight Hopkins in an ordained American Baptist Minister.⁶

Womanist Theologians

The woman who coined the term “Womanist” is Alice Walker. Alice Walker’s work spans from teacher, social worker, and lecturer and author. In 1983 she became the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her novel “The Color Purple.” She has written numerous books which include seven novels, short stories, poetry and children’s books. “Her books have been translated into more than two dozen languages and her books have sold more than fifteen million copies.”⁷ According to “Living by Grace the Autobiographical Website about Author Alice Walker, during her senior year of college Alice Walker became pregnant and decided to have an abortion. After the abortion she became deeply depressed and wrote poetry to help her deal with her feelings of depression. The poetry she wrote during that time became her first published work.”⁸

Dr. Stephanie Mitchem the author of *Introducing Womanist Theology* is the Professor of Religious Studies at the University of South Carolina. She has written numerous books and has traveled the world as a teacher and lecturer. She teaches contemporary theology and women's studies, emphasizing the experiences and

⁶ University of Chicago Divinity, “Dwight N. Hopkins,” accessed October 17, 2017, <http://divinity.uchicago.edu/dwight-n-hopkins/>.

⁷ “Alice Walker: The Official Website,” Alice Walker’s Garden, accessed October 17, 2017, <http://alicewalkersgarden.com>.

⁸ “Biography: The College Years,” Living by Grace, accessed October 17, 2017, http://chrisdanielle.tripod.com/alicebio_2.html.

perspectives of black women, both in the US and in the African Diaspora. Her current research focuses on the intersections of social class, gender constructions, racism, and religions. Dr. Mitchem earned her Ph.D. from Northwestern University.⁹

The late Dr. Linda Hollies was an author, motivational speaker and champion of issues around social justice for women. She was the author of 29 books.¹⁰ Dr. Hollies received her Master of Divinity degree from Garrett Evangelical Seminary and her Ph.D. from United Theological Seminary. She was an ordained United Methodist minister.

Confessional Theologian

Dr. Frank A. Thomas is a preacher, teacher, scholar, lecturer, author and master coach. He holds a Ph.D. in Communication from the University of Memphis and currently serves as the Nettie Sweeney and Hugh Th. Miller Professor of Homiletics at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis.¹¹ Dr. Thomas has pastored New Faith Baptist Church International in Matteson IL and Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis, TN. In 2012, Dr. Thomas retired from pastoral leadership to pursue his passion as a full-time teacher and a Life Coach.

James Cone in his book, *God of the Oppressed* said,

The black church taught me how to deal with the contradictions of life and provided a way to create meaning in a society not of my own making. In the larger “secular” black community, this perspective on life is often called the “art of survival”; but in the black Church, we call it the “grace of God”. It is called survival because it is a way of remaining physically alive in a situation of

⁹ “Department of Religious Studies,” University of South Carolina, accessed October 18, 2017, <http://artsandsciences.sc.edu/relg/stephanie-y-mitchem>.

¹⁰ Linda Hollies, “Day One is a Ministry of the Alliance for Christian Media,” accessed October 18, 2017, http://day1.org/288_the_rev_linda_hollies/.

¹¹ Frank A. Thomas, *The Choice Living Your Passion Inside Out 2013* (Indianapolis, IN: Hope for Life International Books, 2013).

oppression without losing one's dignity. We call it grace because we know it to be an unearned gift from God who is the giver of "every good and perfect gift."¹²

The songs of the church, the redemptive stories in the Bible and preaching from a pastor who always said, no matter where he took his text, "I will not leave you without hope"; all blessed and liberated the African American race. The singing, praying, testimonies and preached word gave hope in times of hopelessness. The black church gave peace and a sense of hope to many. It was in the black church that many realized that no matter what was done, God would not turn God's back on them.

However, with all of that said, even in the church tradition, many women never felt comfortable discussing abortion nor was it ever preached about or discussed in most church settings. There are many things the black church has been openly discussing, but abortion has not been one of them. Even if it had been, many women are not comfortable in volunteering any information regarding their abortion story.

In Cone's book, he goes on to explain how he came to realize that his theology was different from the western theological tradition he learned in seminary because his experiences were different than those of his white professors. Since his theology is different Dr. Cone articulates to us his thoughts on God, Jesus, suffering and liberation. This chapter's primary theological focus will be on that which liberates. Dr. Cone believes that our social and historical context decides not only the questions we address to God but the mode in which we derived our answers to those questions. In other words, our experiences formulate our vision of who God is, how we ask theological questions and how we relate to God.

According to a classical definition, theology is "faith seeking understanding." It is faith venturing to inquire, daring to raise questions...Christian faith asks

¹² James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 1997), 2.

questions, seeks understanding, both because God is always greater than our ideas of God, and because the public world that faith inhabits confronts it with challenges and contradictions that cannot be ignored.¹³

If in fact theology is faith seeking understanding then certainly our theological questions are grounded in our own faith tradition, gender, cultural context and experiences. If that is the case then even those things that cause us shame and guilt can be brought to God for our understanding and forgiveness. We seek to understand how we can find the grace of God in our most humiliating mistakes. Even those secrets that we have kept hidden for many years that have haunted us because we were afraid to address them ourselves.

Dwight Hopkins in his book *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* said,

Black theology of liberation arose from the black church as a movement for the transformation of personal and systemic power-relations in American society. It came out of the effort to affirm God's positive relation to poor African American people and to defend against white supremacy. But its influence is not limited to black people. It also impacts the way traditional theology is done throughout the world.¹⁴

In his book, Hopkins provides us with a chronology of the development of black theology. According to him, the first stage of black theology began with a statement published in the New York Times in 1966, written by a group of African American clergymen called the National Committee of Negro Churchmen (NCNC). Their statement indicated that for too long white people had been exercising power without morality and black people had been practicing morality without power.¹⁵

¹³ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 2-3.

¹⁴ Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 7.

¹⁵ Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology*, 8.

The first stage of black theology began in the throes of the civil rights movement and was limited to debates that were held at churches between African American and white clergy. Black clergy argued that the black power movement embraced Jesus as our liberator, not just liberator for African Americans but for all who were oppressed.

According to Dr. Hopkins, the next stage of the black theological movement derived after the Society for the Study of Black Religion was formed. During the early 1970s when more African Americans were admitted into seminaries black theology became an academic discipline. During the second stage of black theology, "African American theologians struggled over issues such as the relation between liberation and reconciliation, God's goodness and human suffering, African religion and black theology and the spontaneous faith expressions of African American people versus the rigid theological systems of the white academy."¹⁶

The third phase of black theology was more inclusive in that it was no longer limited to clergy. The third phase included clergy, lay people, biblical scholars and community activists. "Stage three also examined relationships with the African American church and the Third World (i.e, Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America). The broad range of participants in this new group reflected black theology's turn toward liberation theologies in the Third World."¹⁷

Phase three was developed in the mid 70's and also began to address survival issues in the black community and began to acknowledge the importance of feminism. More inclusively, our brothers and sisters in other countries' voices were allowed to be heard. This phase of theology opened the door for us to identify the similarities that really bind us together.

The fourth stage of black theology commenced around the middle of the 1980s and involved a second generation of black religious scholars and pastors. These thinkers emphasize an exploration of theology from any and all aspects of black life and most strikingly, the exciting challenge of womanist (black female religious scholars and pastors), who have pressed for a holistic black theology that included race, class, gender, sexual orientation and ecological issues. Womanists have also demonstrated the urgency of doing black theology from such innovative sources as black fiction and women's roles in the Bible. Womanists challenged

¹⁶ Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology*, 10.

¹⁷ Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology*, 9.

the black church with this question: If 70 to 80 percent of its membership is women, instead of saying the “black church,” shouldn’t it be called “the black women’s church?”¹⁸

Personally, the Black church has been a liberating force to help us survive. However, just as African Americans and other minorities had to find ways in which to become liberated outside of the western biblical scholarship, the black church has in many ways discriminated against women. This has required women to find a voice outside of the church.

In the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church denomination, though no one likes to talk about it, discrimination, has also taken place. However, the denomination has been more open to women than many other denominations, we still have a long way to go. The Christian Methodist Episcopal church was organized in 1870. The first woman bishop was elected in 2010. It took 140 years to elect a woman bishop because many of the people in the denomination felt that it was not time for a woman to hold the highest office in the denomination. Yet it would be safe to say that more than 70% of the members in the congregations are women. The sad part about the church’s discrimination against women is many of those who are discriminating against women are women. Some women do not want a woman in leadership over them. Some women complained that they do not want women as their pastors. Some have gone so far as to ask the bishop to send them a male pastor because they do not want women over them. In the case of gender discrimination in the church, some of the victims have become the perpetrators.

Due to some of their own patriarchal issues, African American Liberation Theologians were ill-equipped to give a voice to women in the church and in scholarship.

¹⁸ Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology*, 11.

Though they have done an excellent job in addressing subjects of liberation relating to race and culture, they were unable to address liberation for black women. Partially because they did not know (or did not want to acknowledge) that they were a part of the problem. African American women therefore, had to find their own voices in theological discourse in the form of what was to be known as womanist theology.

Womanist theology is about and for black women. . . If theology includes discussion of the actions of God in human life, then exploration of the presence of God in the lives of black American women is necessary. . . Race, combined with gender, forms and informs the lives of black women.¹⁹

Women in the scholarship and the ecclesia had to find a way for their own voices to be heard. African American women began to enroll in seminaries and find their own voices and support each other in theological discourse. Under this newly found discourse some of their needs that were being addressed were: Women in the Bible were given a voice and a name. Their stories were finally being told. Alice Walker is a writer and activist who coined the term “womanist” in her book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*.²⁰ Walker states that the word “womanist” is a derivation of “womanish, . . . from the black folk expression. ‘You’re acting womanish.’”²¹ She includes within her definition the multidimensionality of the black woman, with one being her ability of leading slaves to freedom because the black woman is concerned about the freedom of all black people, both male and female. Black women’s sexuality is also included in the definition, as she loves her brothers and sisters, sexually and non-sexually, and she also loves herself.

¹⁹ Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 5.

²⁰ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi-xii.

²¹ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, xiii.

Storytelling is the gift of self-disclosure. When someone dares to listen with openness and comprehension, the teller can take off her mask of hiding. Women have been forced to lie, to build defenses and to “act” in certain ways because no one wanted to listen to their “real and honest” story.²⁵

Dr. Hollies goes on to say, “When you are the listener to a woman’s story, often it becomes your privilege to remind her of this fact. She needs to be made freshly aware that she is not alone; that there is a grand purpose for her life and that her role in God’s story is of great value.”²⁶

Dr. Frank A. Thomas in his book, *The Choice, Living Your Passion Inside Out*, writes about “Confessional Theology.” Dr. Thomas states:

When we confess one to another, we find healing for the soul. Specifically, I mean that we grow in Christ by acknowledging our positive and uplifting strength, gifts, and accomplishments and by honest grappling, acceptance, and forgiveness of our faults, flaws, and mistakes. Faults, flaws, and mistakes are not things to be ashamed of or forever hidden; rather they actually deepen us in the faith when given to God and “acknowledged” or “confessed.” This form of confessional theology is anchored in Paul CONFESSING three times for his thorn in his flesh to be removed and God saying “My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:7-11 NIV).²⁷

Confessional theology is our faith seeking understanding as we admit our faults and confess them to God so we can be forgiven, but also confessing them to each other so we can help heal each other. Confessional theology frees us up to openly acknowledge that we are not perfect. That we have all been through something, but God has brought us through. In his book Dr. Thomas shares his own vulnerabilities in such a way that is liberating to those who read it. In knowing Dr. Thomas personally as a homiletics

²⁵ Hollies, *Womanist Care*, 5.

²⁶ Hollies, *Womanist Care*, 5.

²⁷ Frank A. Thomas, *The Choice Living your Passion Inside Out* (Indianapolis, IN: Hope for Life International Books, 2013), xiii.

professor, it appeared as though he had himself together. In his work, his candor was appreciated because of mutual struggles. When individuals are transparent with others we encourage and liberate each other to share their stories and to feel the connectedness to other brother and sister Christians. Dr. Thomas goes on to say:

Confessional theology is the place where we all can say that we are works in progress; that we have salvation; but the work of sanctification is in process in our lives. As a matter of fact, the person who does not confess is living in a state of denial, hypocrisy, or pride, because the Christian faith at its heart is confessional.²⁸

Confessional theology is one of the ways in which we are able to tell our stories.

“Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another, that you may be healed. . . . (James 5:16 KJV).” Confessional theology is not about hearing someone’s story so you can know their business and gossip about their weaknesses. Or so you can hold their weaknesses over them. Confessional theology gives a chance to really and truthfully witness how God strengthens others in their weaknesses so we may become strengthened together.

Confessional theology is the interior space of a person’s head, the discussion of the inner and complicated motivations that we face and confront on a daily basis and often do not speak, even to ourselves. We avoid confessional theology when we tell the story of success and rewards in ministry, such as megachurches, multiple degrees, voluminous speaking engagements, material accoutrements, etc., and do not talk about the sacrifices, pains and the tremendous costs - - first to get to that point and then even more to stay there. To preach the healing grace but never grapple honestly and publicly with despair in our own souls is disingenuous. To talk about blessings, miracles, and breakthroughs in the present and future tense, but only talk about our struggles in the past tense, according to confessional theology, is a form of evasion of truth. . . . In my estimation confessional theology is to be nakedly honest, or as they say in the hip-hop world to “keep it real.” At the heart, confessional theology is an invitation to deep and meaningful relationship with others. In some sense, you do not really know me until you know my faults, flaws and mistakes²⁹

²⁸ Thomas, *The Choice Living Your Passion Inside Out*, xiii.

²⁹ Thomas, *The Choice Living Your Passion Inside Out*, xiv.

Liberation Theology, womanist theology and confessional theology were selected because they are the disciplines that will help bring healing and deliverance to post abortive women. Liberation theology was selected because throughout the Bible and the black church, Jesus who we have come to know as the liberator of all humankind can set us free. Liberation theology's focus is on those who have been marginalized. Jesus healed the sick; (healer), fed the hungry (provider); cast out demons (deliverer); and forgave those who were caught in sin (savior). Post abortive women need to be liberated from their secrets and shame by knowing that they have been forgiven. Introducing Christ as liberator will be a part of the project through biblical stories that show his redemptive power.

The second theological discipline used is womanist theology because of the need to address healing for post abortive women who are African American. There are limited resources for women who are African American and Protestant living in the Chicago area. Resources were discovered for Catholic women (in Indiana) and even then none were being facilitated by African American women. One of the concepts of womanist theology is women telling their stories for sisters to find healing and to receive validation from other women who are like them.

Womanist theology also focuses on biblical interpretation from a female perspective. Giving power and a voice to women in the Bible who never had a voice before. Also allowing women to witness the redemptive power of Jesus Christ who openly challenged biases and loved the un-loved. The goal is to empower women who have been held in bondage to share their secrets and once they have heard the stories of

other sisters, they will come to realize that their sins have been forgiven and hopefully they will learn to forgive themselves.

Finally, Confessional Theology will be used to invite those who participate to be transparent. It is my prayer that the women in my project will be able to realize that there is no need to hide our flaws, moles and warts. I pray that they will come to realize that our makeup, hair, nails and fake eyelashes are only cover-ups that we use to disguise the pain we feel inside. I am hoping we freely share in supporting one another's weaknesses, vulnerabilities and frailties so we can all be healed together. By confessing not just our successes, but what it took to get there, and by confessing our faults to each other; by taking off the masks of our degrees, our titles, our marital status, entrepreneurial skills, etc. and focus on bringing healing to each other by lifting each other up and "keeping it real!"

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to address the emotional impact that abortion has on women; the issues in which they have not been allowed to grieve and how not grieving may impact other areas of their lives. This chapter will give a definition of abortion along with the different causes of abortion. Women have abortions for differing reasons. The chapter will discuss the reasons and how the impact of abortion may in many instances cause those involved to experience guilt and shame. In this chapter the discussion will occur with pastoral care professionals who are experts in grief counseling, therapists who have done extensive research on the subject of the unspoken pain of abortion and professionals who argue that there are no psychological or physical challenges associated with abortion.

This chapter also includes a brief observation regarding how African Americans sometimes express grief differently from Caucasians. During the research one particular article that was of interest was how individuals grieve differently. I found it to be interesting because it confirmed (after attending a post-abortion retreat) that the project should focus on healing for African American women. This chapter will also be shaped by personal experiences such as attending a retreat for those who have been impacted by abortion and watching “Maafa 21.”

Maafa 21 is a documentary which suggests that after the abolition of slavery, African Americans were no longer needed or wanted by white America and were therefore encouraged to use birth control and or have abortions as a means to control the African American population. According to the documentary, the founder of Planned Parenthood, Margaret Sanger was a racist who wanted to get rid of the black race and therefore put a program in place to accomplish that goal. The movie intimated that since Planned Parenthood's inception, the African American population has decreased by 25%. To provide an example of Planned Parenthood's desire to control African American population, the movie also points out that the majority of Planned Parenthood centers are in African American communities. The documentary was quite informative and additional research will serve the project well.

Abortion is the expulsion of the human fetus prematurely, that is before it is capable of surviving outside the womb. An accident may cause an abortion, or artificial means may induce one. A therapeutic abortion is done when the termination of the pregnancy is necessary for the sake of the mother's physical health; a psychiatric abortion, for her mental health. A eugenic abortion is used as a means of keeping retarded or deformed children from being born; social abortion is used to ease economic pressure on a family; ethical abortion is used in cases of rape or incest and abortion on demand permits abortion for any or no reason.¹ Accordingly abortion can be a major loss and any time a major loss occurs, grieving is inevitable. Additionally, abortion is one of the only losses where the parents are not encouraged to grieve. Further, unresolved grief is known to cause physical, psychological and psychosomatic problems to the victim.

¹ C. C. Ryrie, *Biblical Answers to Tough Questions* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1991), 79-86.

Whether the reason for abortion is therapeutic (where the mother's life is in danger) psychiatric (where the mother's mental health is in question), eugenic, (where the possibility of a disability or mental retardation is the issue), social (where the family cannot afford another child), or ethical (where rape or incest has resulted in the pregnancy) guilt and shame can still be major factors in the loss. No matter which definition is used, there can in many instances be guilt and shame associated with abortion. The goal is to find ways in which to assist in alleviating the guilt and shame associated with abortion and help to bring wholeness back to the person's life.

In her book, *Forbidden Grief*, Dr. Theresa Burke begins by explaining how she first became aware of the forbidden grief of abortion. When she was a graduate student facilitating a support group for women with eating disorders one of them shared with the group that she was having problems with nightmares and flashbacks about an abortion she had many years previous. Out of that confession came other women in the group who had also experienced abortions. Six out of the eight women in the group were post abortive and suffering psychologically because of it.

When Theresa spoke to her supervisor (a psychiatrist) about what occurred in her group, he reprimanded her and reminded her that her support group was for eating disorders not abortions and she was therefore forbidden to discuss abortion with that group again. That incident made her wonder if there was a correlation between their abortions and eating disorders. However, she did not ever bring the subject up to her support group again.²

² Theresa Karminski Burke and David C. Reardon, *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2007), 26,

What Theresa continued to find was that some people did not believe that there was any trauma associated with abortion. She writes:

Defenders of abortion have often tried to sidestep the question of abortion's psychological risks by arguing that having an "unwanted" baby is even more "traumatic" than having an abortion. This argument, however, is always raised in the context of dismissing evidence regarding post-abortion trauma. It is never accompanied by research citations showing that women who give birth suffer more psychological injury than women who have abortions, because no such studies exist. Instead, this argument is an unsupported assertion that is really an attempt to shift attention away from the real issue at hand: the fact that abortion does have significant psychological consequences. While it is fitting to compare the psychological experiences of having a child and having an abortion, very little research has been done to make this comparison. All we have at present are people's assertions.³

There is an article regarding Post Abortion Stress Syndrome (PASS), which supports Dr. Burke's theory as it relates to the significant psychological consequences of the impact of abortion. The article stated:

PASS is the name that has been given to the psychological after effects of abortion, based on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is important to note that this is not a term that has been accepted by the American Psychiatric Association or the American Psychological Association. In fact, pro-choice advocates accuse their counterparts of making up PASS in order to further their political agendas.⁴

The author of the article indicated that even if a woman makes a decision to have an abortion and she feels that it is the right decision she should still have the option of being able to receive adequate counseling if she experienced trauma as a result of the decision she made no matter what the trauma is called. However, both the American Psychological and Psychiatric Associations do not accept the concept of Post Abortion Stress Syndrome.

³ Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 26.

⁴ Susanne Babbel, "Post Abortion Stress Syndrome (PASS) – Does It Exist?" *Psychology Today*, accessed December 1, 2014, www.psychologytoday.com.

When Theresa Burke concluded her eating disorder support group, she continued to think about the women who were suffering from the aftermath of their abortions. Later she began to look for research on post abortion grief and trauma, but found very little on the subject. Yet she increasingly found that during her counseling sessions she encountered many women who had abortions and appeared to be suffering from post-abortion trauma. She wrote:

As a result, many women and men suffer in silence, in complete numbness, or with the frightening and bewildering feeling that they are going crazy. Grief following an abortion can be extremely complicated and can be experienced on all levels of the personality. For many women, the source of their distress may go unrecognized, unspoken, and unnamed.⁵

These findings were encouraging and it is believed that more women have had abortions than are willing to admit it or are willing to get help in grieving because of their guilt and shame.

In the book titled *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs*, the authors indicate that since no two occasions for grieving are exactly the same, grief is always a response to the particular loss of the object.⁶

In other words, an individual's grief is primarily related to the particular loss and though people grieve differently, there are also some similarities in the way people grieve. He used one of his clients as an example who was grieving the loss of his wife. His client in addition to feeling loss, felt as if no one had ever experienced what he was feeling. Additionally, his client's grief affected him physically. His body ached, he felt empty and he felt totally absorbed by his loss. Though his client's grief was unique to his

⁵ Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, xvi.

⁶ Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983).

occasion, the author indicated that there were also some common factors that related to his grief that were also similar to others who had experienced similar losses.⁷ The author defined grief as

The normal but bewildering cluster of ordinary human emotions arising in response to a significant loss, intensified and complicated by the relationship to the person or the object lost. Guilt, shame, loneliness, anxiety, anger, terror, bewilderment, emptiness, profound sadness, despair, helplessness; are all part of grief and are all common to being human. Grief is the clustering of some or all of these emotions in response to loss.⁸

Grief is described as a clustering of many emotions in response to the loss. With that said, there can be a myriad of emotions associated with the loss of a loved one. Unexplained, sometimes uncontrolled, differing, but all happening in response to your loss. Intensified by what your relationship was with that which was lost. Imagine what it would be like if you do not allow yourself to grieve. Add to that not feeling that you are supposed to grieve. Imagine feeling that what you did is so shameful you do not deserve to grieve; you have no right to grieve over a loss that happened because of a decision you made.

“Normal” grieving involves support from family members and loved ones.

Persons who have voluntarily terminated their pregnancies either do not grieve or do so without support from anyone. Many who are post abortive may never bring closure to their loss because they experience guilt and shame and much of the time they are in this process alone and because they kept it a secret they never confessed their guilt and shame to anyone for healing to begin.

The authors of *All Our Losses All Our Grievs* also indicated that grief is inevitable; that there is no loss without grief, but it is possible for a person not to grieve. Persons

⁷ Mitchell and Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs*.

⁸ Mitchell and Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs*, 54.

can choose not to grieve, they may choose not to express feelings of grief and when that happens they just store up grief, which can be unhealthy. Many women who had abortions never grieved. Either they chose not to grieve or they were convinced that they are better off forgetting about it.

The goals of grieving according the author are the following:
To enable a person to live a life relatively unencumbered by attachments to the person or thing lost; to recognize and live with the reality of the loss and the feelings occasioned by it. Moving toward these goals can involve a variety of activities, and any activity that moves one in this direction is “normal.”⁹

However, it is very difficult for an individual to express grief in a healthy manner if they are experiencing guilt and shame surrounding the object of their loss with little or no support.

Renowned pastoral care expert and author, Edward Wimberly in *Moving from Shame to Self-Worth* indicated that when an individual confesses their shame it lessens the impact of the shame. However, when your loss is kept a secret, confessing your shame can be very difficult. He wrote:

Psychologically, confessing shame or guilt is an attempt to acknowledge that shame has occurred and to relieve it by going to others and telling them about it. The difference between shame and guilt is that shame involves global attributions of fault to the entire self while guilt is attributed to a specific act. In the process of confessing shame, one externalizes the shame.¹⁰

That is, shame is acknowledged by allowing oneself to be aware of its existence, but one detaches the self from it by means of placing it outside the self. Here the externalization enables one to move from being the observed to the observer. Confession is also a way of undoing the original shame scene. In the original shame, some expectation or standard was not met, and the person attributed blame and fault to the entire self, not just to the behavior.¹¹

⁹ Mitchell and Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs*, 86.

¹⁰ Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1995), 131.

¹¹ Edward P. Wimberly, *Moving from Shame to Self-Worth: Preaching and Pastoral Care* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 75.

Shame involves the internalization of whatever the fault or shortcoming is on your entire self and guilt is specific to one act. Confessing the shame minimizes it.

The world we live in today is fractured and less controlled by a cohesive worldview. In fact there are many competing worldviews that we must choose from in order to bring meaning to our lives. These worldviews, or assumptive worlds, do not always help our self-esteem or self-affirmation. These assumptive worlds often produce a culture of shame that undermines our sense of self and works against our growth and positive mental, emotional and spiritual health.¹²

Pastoral theologians and pastoral psychologists tell us how devastating it can be to deny and keep from our awareness our feelings of shame and humiliation. John Patton in *Is Human Forgiveness Possible* provides a series of negative results that the denial of shame can have on the development of personality.¹³

The way ego functions to prevent us from being overwhelmed by shame requires elaborate defenses. Recent shame psychology, which is an outgrowth of these psychoanalytic traditions, shows that we take into ourselves the original shame event and shame scenes as a means of defending ourselves against them. What is taken in is remembered and becomes the organizing and governing memory for future encounters with shameful events and people.¹⁴

Putting into words our shame prevents us from having to hold on to these feelings. It is only when feelings are not expressed that we swallow shame. Swallowing shame is what creates the internal problem in the first place. "In days not too far gone, we would use the mechanism of testimonies within the African American church tradition to talk openly about the shame we encountered as a way to keep from swallowing the shame."¹⁵

¹² Andrew P. Morrison, *The Culture of Shame* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1996), 13.

¹³ John Patton, *Is Human Forgiveness Possible?* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985), 87.

¹⁴ Gershen Kaufman, *The Psychology of Shame: Theory and Treatment of Shame Based Syndromes* (New York, NY: Springer, 1989), 84.

¹⁵ Wimberly, *Moving from Shame to Self-Worth*, 56.

In “Sisters of the Yam,” Dr. Bell Hooks explained differences in ways that African Americans experience death from their Caucasian counterparts. In the chapter “Facing and Feeling Loss,” she observed from her own life’s experiences that death in the black culture was a time not only for grieving but rejoicing. In the African American community, many times a funeral is no longer called a funeral, but a “Home Going Celebration.” The Home Going Celebration is a time in which to celebrate the life of your loved one and the focus is to share positive experiences about that person, but you are also allowed to openly grieve your loss. In other words, you may hear uplifting music, scriptures that give you hope, some humorous anecdotes from family and friends; and words of comfort from the clergy. Yet you may also hear sobs from family and friends as they celebrate the life of their loved one and openly grieve their loss. In her book Dr. Hooks wrote:

Death was one of the rare moments when it was socially acceptable for folks to let go emotionally, to break down and surrender to their grief. These healthy approaches to death and dying made it possible for black people to confront and cope with loss. Learning how to express and accept grief was absolutely essential for black people living in the midst of profound racial apartheid. Without adequate medical care, denied entry to segregated hospitals, black folks could not keep death at a distance.¹⁶

In our process of self-recovery, black women must learn how to face death and dying in a manner that enables us to restore and renew our spirits. We can learn from the old ways. . . Sharing with one another ways to process pain and grief, black women must challenge old myths that would have us repress emotional feelings in order to appear “strong.” This is important because bottled-in grief can erupt into illness.¹⁷

¹⁶ Bell Hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1993), 100-101.

¹⁷ Hooks, *Sisters of the Yam*, 101.

Again, the subject of unresolved grief causing us to become physically ill is mentioned. Though grief can be very painful, it can actually be healthy because it allows closure to the loss. Expressing grief acknowledges that loss was significant and acknowledging the loss can help bring renewal physically and spiritually.

Dr. Wimberly recommends that telling our stories is one way in which to find healing along with telling biblical stories and preaching. He believes that changing views that people bring to events and relationships can be done through storytelling. He recommends that stories should be told in a way that the person will be able to see themselves and their circumstances differently. In many instances, he gave narratives of how he provided pastoral care for his clients by telling them a biblical story in a contemporary way and allowing the person to see themselves in the story thereby, changing their worldview.¹⁸

As an example, on how to utilize biblical storytelling in pastoral care, Dr. Wimberly gave an example of how the Twenty-Third Psalm helped bring healing to one of his clients. At one time he was counseling to a woman who was recovering from drugs and had relapsed a few times. Due to her illness, she felt worthless and overpowered by her addiction and was seeking help from him on how to utilize spiritual resources to overcome her temptations. At the time she came to meet with him she had been sober for about three months and he was using biblical narratives to minister to her.

After being under his care for a while she came to an appointment one day to excitedly tell him about her recent experience. She told Dr. Wimberly that one day as she was driving home she heard a voice telling her that since she had been doing so well, she

¹⁸ Wimberly, *Moving from Shame to Self-Worth*, 54.

should celebrate her sobriety by taking a drink. The voice even gave her directions on where to get the drink from in a fairly close location. She knew immediately it was Satan so she began to recite the Lord's Prayer. As she recited the Lord's prayer, she felt a little better, but she knew Satan had not left her so, she then began to quote the Twenty-Third Psalm and when she got to the part that said, "I will fear no evil for thou are with me," immediately she felt Satan leave her presence.

Storytelling, and introducing biblical narratives that are similar to the person's own dilemma are a positive means in which to help bring healing to grieving persons. Many of the resources advocated storytelling as a way to begin to heal from grief. Grief is a very difficult process. Many people are afraid to grieve because they have never fully understood the grief process. In fact, grieving is a multifaceted process that we must learn how to do.¹⁹

Healing involves naming, claiming, and taming an unspeakable wound so that you can move out of the silence and beyond the secret. To grieve means to open up and release the toxic feelings and emotions that are robbing your life of joy and peace. Recovery can begin until you peel away festering layers of guilt and anger. This will expose the underlying wound of loss, which can then be treated through the grief process. Will there be a scar? Yes, but the infection will be gone. You can and will be whole again.²⁰

Dr. Theresa Burke in *Forbidden Grief* indicates she believes in order to work through your grief you have to allow yourself to experience it as an acceptable emotion.

You need to know that grieving is an acceptable process. You will not be able to grieve if you keep telling yourself that you must be strong, or that not thinking about it will help, or that you have nothing to feel bad about. All of those excuses are forms of denial by which women and men seek to hide their sense of loss . . . Abortion is a death experience. Whether you want to call it, "losing a pregnancy," losing a "potential person," or the death of your baby, it is still a

¹⁹ Theresa A. Rando, *The Treatment of Complicated Mourning* (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 1993), 127.

²⁰ Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 246.

loss . . . Giving permission to grieve means facing the painful reality of what was lost and how it was lost. Yet denial usually takes time to eliminate and often breaks down into stages. (1) Recognition; this entails admitting the problem. (2) The second phase of breaking denial is acceptance. During this phase the problem is addressed, but often with conditions and continued reluctance to fully face the true nature and seriousness of the problem. In the final phase of working through denial comes surrender. Here there is a complete resignation to the reality of the situation and a willingness to address its true nature and meaning. Once this phase is reached, the work of feeling one's grief and letting it go can begin.²¹

Feeling one's grief is a very difficult process because many times we feel that it would be better not feel at all than to feel the pain of loss.

Dr. Theresa Burke has developed the Rachel's Vineyard retreats to help in the healing of grief from voluntary pregnancy termination. The Rachel's Vineyard retreat is designed to make you think about your abortion experience (something that is very painful to bring back to remembrance). You are also challenged to think about the ways the loss affected you and identify the pain that still exists. The retreat helps participants to deal with the pain, shame, guilt and suffering the abortion may have caused them. Attending the retreat helps to work through the phase of denial which is acceptance. The many raw emotions that come to surface during the retreat allow hope and honest acceptance without judgment and humiliation. Participants are encouraged to finally accept their grief.

The retreat also uses rituals to help participants connect with and support each other. Participants are able to release grief without feeling embarrassed because everyone had been through the same thing. Participants cry together, sometimes laugh, talk and listened to each other. They hug and sometimes squeeze each other's hand and offer words of encouragement. Participants listen to soothing music, prayers, stories of

²¹ Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 249-250.

hope both biblical and from attendees. Participants become sisters rallying for each other's healing.

Participation in the retreat is a major blessing. The retreat encouraged participants to tell and listen to each other's stories and to participate in a memorial service for the unborn children. However, there were no other African American women in attendance (except the person who came as my support person) and none of the women were Protestant. The retreat was facilitated by Catholics and a Catholic priest was in attendance for a portion of the retreat.

The priest invited the attendees to meet with him for confession and he gave the memorial service sermon. My faith tradition does not require that I speak to a priest to confess to God, so I did not participate during the time the priest was available for confession. Also, when his memorial service sermon did not reflect in any way that it was a sermon for a memorial service. Also, when the communion was offered, those of us who were not Catholic were not invited to the table. However, upon departure from that weekend retreat, healing had definitely taken place.

Two rituals that were particularly touching were the naming ceremony and the memorial service. These rituals allowed participants to bring closure to the loss in a positive way. We experienced God's love and healing in such a wonderful way. Upon departure from Rachel's Vineyard, the guilt and shame were gone and a great weight had been lifted. The final phase of denial had been reached which Dr. Burke called "surrender." She indicated in "Forbidden Grief" that feeling one's grief and letting it go can begin once we surrender."²²

²² Burke, *Forbidden Grief*, 250.

In closing, it is important to address the problem of creating a caring community for women who have been impacted by abortion. Those women could have experienced abortion or those who have daughters who have experienced abortion. They may have been impacted by taking a friend to have an abortion or been someone who encouraged someone else to have an abortion. I identified ways to help bring healing to women who have been impacted by abortion as we change the subject from whether we are pro-choice or pro-life to how do we help those who have already experienced abortion.

Clinical and pastoral care professionals have both indicated that care can be provided to persons experiencing grief by storytelling, both biblical and through their own testimonies. Also, providing persons with the tools to work their way through the different phases of denial and to work through the guilt and shame they have been living with will be our goal.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The final chapter brings to the conclusion a research project of healing from “Voluntary Pregnancy Termination” (VPT) otherwise known as abortion. (I will be using this term interchangeably.) The purpose of the project, is to begin the process of healing and forgiveness to those who have been impacted by VPT.

The church should be a safe place for hurting people to be able to deal with their pain without the fear of being judged, ostracized or rejected. It is of the utmost importance that those being ministered to, be assured that whatever they share will be kept in the strictest confidentiality. Many people are afraid of the church because someone in the church has hurt them and they no longer feel like the church is a place where they can feel safe and secure. Hurting people should be able to feel the comfort of God’s love. I want them to know that God can and will heal them if they will trust God to be their healer.

I entered into the Doctor of Ministry program, to better understand who I am. God has called me to minister to hurting people. God has not allowed me to go through all I have been through just to keep it to myself. I am blessed to be a blessing. I am healed to help bring healing. I have been restored to assist in the restoration of another sister or brother. I have been delivered, so someone else can be delivered. Christ has set

me free and whom the son sets free, is free indeed. I want to help someone else be free in Christ.

With that being said, I am so grateful and honored that God allows me to work in God's ministry to aid in the healing of hurting people. I am clear that God allows me to participate in God's ministry for the up-building of God's kingdom. "God's spirit is on me, he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor, sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, To set the burdened and battered free, to announce, "This is God's year to act" (Luke 4:18, The Message Bible).¹

As the director of this project, I am the Presiding Elder of the Chicago District of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. In that capacity I have the overall responsibility of overseeing fifteen churches in and around Chicago, Illinois. Also, I pastor a small congregation on the south side of Chicago and have served as a pastor for over thirteen years and was assigned to the current church five years ago.

The church was chosen as my context because I found that within the church are many women who made the choice to have abortions and have carried guilt and shame from making that decision for many years and the church does not address that issue. Due to the taboo of choosing to have an abortion, the church has failed to provide pastoral care ministries to women who are experiencing unresolved grief associated with VPT.

Statement of Purpose

The title of my project is "Changing the Subject: Creating Caring Communities for Women Impacted by Abortion." Changing the subject means this project will not be

¹ Eugene Peterson, *The Message Remix: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2003), 1872.

addressing issues of pro-life and pro-choice. The subject is how we can help persons find healing. When the subject is changed from a God who holds everything you do against you, to the God who loves you in the midst of your pain; I believe the process of healing will begin. The participants will be able to choose life through new biblical resources that will be offered to them.

This project was done to address the emotional impact that abortion has on women; the issues in which they have not been allowed to grieve and how not grieving may impact other areas of their lives. This chapter will discuss how the following foundations papers have informed my project: biblical, historical, theological and theoretical.

The Bible has always been a source of comfort and hope for those in need. The Old Testament scripture selected for the biblical foundation chapter is 2 Samuel 11:26-27, 12:24. This particular narrative was selected because as I read the story of Bathsheba, I observed that she suffered very significant losses in a short time and could have possibly experienced some issues of unresolved grief. She experienced an inordinate amount of grief and suffering during a short period of time. Bathsheba was married to a soldier named Uriah. While he was at war, she slept with King David, found out she was pregnant, and sent word back to the king. The king then had her husband murdered. After going through a brief period of grief Bathsheba was then taken into the king's palace to be married to him. All in a matter of a few months or so.

What happens next is even more devastating, 2 Samuel 11:27b lets us know that God was displeased with what David had done and sent the prophet Nathan to give King David a parable about a rich man taking a poor man's sheep. David thought the story

was true and was incensed by the callousness of the rich man only to find out the rich man represented himself and the poor man represented Uriah (Bathsheba's slain husband). God's punishment for the adulterous relationship and subsequent murder was that the child Bathsheba was carrying would die. David begged God not to take the baby's life, but after a seven day illness the baby died. Though the text does not tell us how Bathsheba grieved the loss of her first born, verse twenty-four says, "Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba and he went to her and lay with her." Indicating that she grieved the loss of her baby. It is my assertion that Bathsheba may have had to deal with unresolved issues of grief over the loss of her husband, marrying his murderer and the loss of first born child. Grief unresolved is unhealthy grief.

When ministering with women who have been impacted by abortion, this text will offer a biblical example of how circumstances that are shameful can be a stumbling block toward healing. Although Bathsheba did not experience voluntary pregnancy termination, she had plenty of reasons to experience shame and guilt. Her adulterous relationship, her pregnancy, the murder of her husband, her marriage to his murderer and the loss of her child. These coupled with not having a faith community to aid in the healing could result in unresolved grief and unhealthy healing. Having a biblical example of this will also show how many of the issues we experienced that have brought us shame are also part of our biblical narrative. Yet, even in the midst of suffering there is a word of liberation and hope to bring us healing as exemplified in the Gospel of Matthew.

The New Testament text is found in Matthew 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted." This text is found in what is called the Sermon on the Mount. I have selected this text because of my focus on unresolved grief. It is my desire to

illustrate through the word of God that even though we may mourn we can still be blessed. This text gives hope to those who mourn and even calls them blessed. Using this text, will demonstrate hope and healing as an example of how Jesus views those in mourning, with his blessings. This New Testament text directs us to the ability to hope in the Lord that we can be blessed even as we mourn. In his Sermon on the Mount, one thing I found interesting about Jesus' teaching is that those whom he says are blessed are not necessarily endowed with musical talent or artistic ability, they are not the highly intelligent or well educated. Those that he is calling blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn. Those who Jesus is calling blessed hardly seem to be blessed in this world's view. As we "change the subject," this text is a starting place to give other biblical examples of how God loves, cares for, and forgives those who others have deemed as outcasts. As in the title of my ministry project, "changing the subject" highlights biblical examples of healing and hope for those who have lost the hope that they are loved and cared for by God as well as the church community.

The concept of a blessing was very important in the Ancient Near East, so much more than today. Today we use the term loosely, but during biblical times blessings were very important in the life of the faith community. To bless meant to be filled with benefits and to be blessed by God was considered the essential element of a successful and satisfying life, but the text is saying to us even when we are blessed we may still mourn.

The text then reminds us that there is more than one way to mourn. One way to mourn is to be sorrowful. You may mourn over the loss of a loved one, or a relationship that is ending. You may mourn the loss of a job or a career. Jesus promised in our text

that those who mourn will be comforted. Scripture declares that God comforts his people in times of distress. When someone comforts us they bring strength to us and when God comforts us, God strengthens us. We can also find comfort by sharing with someone else in the midst of our pain. God will comfort us in our mourning; when we bear each other burdens, or share in each other's pain. One of the ways in which I believe people will be comforted during this ministry project is by sharing their stories with others and sharing in each other's pain. Our next focus will be the historical foundation for this project. This subject has quite an interesting historical background.

As I began my research on the history of abortion, I was quite surprised to find that VPT (abortions) were practiced in ancient Greece and Rome. In antiquity, concerns about abortion were rarely, if at all regarding the fetus because the fetus was not considered a human. Concerns were more for the health and welfare of the mother and the father.

From the earliest days of ancient Greece and Rome, VPT was more common among the wealthy than among the poor. Motives for obtaining an abortion were no less varied in antiquity than they are today. However, many times rich women were motivated to have abortions because they did not want to share their wealth with "lower-class children" fathered illegitimately. Another motivation for rich women to abort was their desire to preserve their sex appeal, and not wanting to lose their figures by having babies.²

Methods for VPT also varied in antiquity. Some women took poisons, some took mixtures of herbs and alcohol; still others used mechanical methods to cause abortion.

² Michael Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish and Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1982), 14.

Some women chose to bind their bodies tightly around the womb while others struck the womb in an attempt to expel the fetus. Other methods were done by using abortive instruments.³

Both Plato and Aristotle recommended population control by abortion. For the rich, who did not want to share their wealth with many children, VPT was an option and also for the poor who could not afford to support large families. Abortion was also used as a means of contraception.

During the early fourth and fifth centuries the first ecclesiastical laws against abortion were passed. If a women committed adultery, became pregnant and had an abortion, she would not be able to receive communion or be baptized until she was on her death bed. Some laws required that women be excommunicated from the church for life for having abortions.⁴

In 1871, the American Medical Association (AMA) sponsored a study indicating that approximately one million women were having abortions annually in the United States. Not much has changed because in 2011 statistics indicated that one point one million women in the U.S. had abortions. The number of women who were having abortions back then and who are having them now are at an equal rate.⁵

In 1973, the landmark “Roe versus Wade” decision impacted abortion laws in the United States. The law came to being as a result of a Texas woman who alleged that she had been raped and was denied the right to have a legalized abortion. The case traveled

³ Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 15.

⁴ Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church*, 17.

⁵ Dallas Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right – From Polite to Fiery Protest* (New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 72.

from the Texas courts to the Supreme Court. However, the case took so long, as her pregnancy proceeded she made the decision to have the baby. This case impacted laws that are still in effect today. In *Roe versus Wade*, the Supreme Court decided that during the first trimester the state could not control abortion in any way. During the second trimester the state could only control the abortion if it was unhealthy for the fetus or the mother, and in the third trimester the state could completely control the abortion of the fetus if it was viable in order to protect the fetus.

Prior to the 1960s, studies of the psychological effects of abortion indicated almost without exception that abortion caused trauma and posed a severe threat to the psychological wellbeing of the women who had them. However, by the late 1960s the American Medical Association (AMA), the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association (APA) reversed their decision stating that further research indicated that abortion was safe and had no harmful psychological effects on the mother.

In the late 1970s and 1980s a few women who had experienced emotional and or physical problems after abortion decided to band together to organize support groups and provide counseling for women traumatized by abortion. They disagreed with the findings of the AMA and APA. Out of this movement organizations supporting women who had experienced trauma after abortion were formed. In addition to a “Biblical method of changing the subject,” the historical information gathered will help women to understand the historical context and how women have been dealing with the stigma of abortions throughout history.⁶ History gives a modern perspective on an ancient issue. History sets

⁶ Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement*, 102.

the tone in the evolution and dynamics surrounding issues specific to women. As women understand they are not the first to experience these issues of shame, guilt, and unforgiveness, their shame will find community, offer hope for healing, and make the secret more exposed to provide the environment for healing. The God of hope and liberation brings us to our next section as we explore ways in which to change the subject from the God who judges and punishes to the God who liberates and heals.

It is my opinion that all too often women, especially African American women, who have voluntarily terminated their pregnancies, end up suffering needlessly because of the secrets, shame, and guilt associated with the sin of abortion preached, taught and lived out in many faith traditions. I believe the time has come to change the subject from whether or not one should have an abortion, to how to minister to the millions of women who have terminated their pregnancies and have kept it a secret because they were ashamed of being judged; or they believed they could not ask for forgiveness because they knew what they were doing.

The question becomes, how do we create safe places for women to tell and retell their stories so they can be liberated from the secret, shame and guilt they have carried around for many years? I believe that it is not God's intention that women should suffer because of their choice. God is a God of liberation, healing and grace and not one who would desire that women live their lives in secret, shame and guilt, not receiving the forgiveness of others or not being able to forgiving herself.

The church has been our way to find liberation from our oppression and oppressors. Many men and women have found hope in the black church when there was no other way. Yet it was through the discourse of black liberation, womanist and

confessional theology that really set the framework for my theological position. My theological position has been influenced by the voices of James Cone and Dwight Hopkins as liberation theologians, as well as womanist theologians Stephanie Mitchem, Alice Walker and Linda Hollies. Finally, the voice of Dr. Frank Thomas who introduced to me confessional theology; our faith seeking understanding as we admit and confess our faults one to another freeing us up to openly acknowledge that we are not perfect. These theological discourses have helped to develop my position for this project. In addition to hearing the voices of theologians, we must utilize the work of grief counselors, therapists and psychologists to inform our theoretical foundation for this chapter.

In my theoretical foundation chapter, we heard from pastoral care professionals who are experts in grief counseling, therapists who have done extensive research on the subject of the unspoken pain of abortion and professionals who argue against any psychological or physical challenges associated with abortion.

In the book titled, *All Our Losses, All Our Grief*, the authors indicated that since no two occasions for grieving are exactly the same, grief is always a response to the particular loss of whatever the object is.”⁷ In other words, an individual’s grief is primarily related to the particular loss and though people grieve differently, there are also some similarities in the way people grieve.

In *Sisters of the Yam*, Dr. Bell Hooks explained differences in ways that African Americans experience death from their Caucasian counterparts. She observed from her life’s experiences that death in the black culture was a time not only for grieving but rejoicing. “The Home Going Celebration” is a time in which to celebrate the life of your

⁷ Burke, *All Our Losses, All Our Grief*, 53.

loved one but also openly grieve your loss. Dr. Hooks also indicated that in the African American community, death is one of the rare moments when it is socially acceptable for folks to let go emotionally. During death we can break down and surrender to grief. Healthy grieving is important to the process of emotional healing after a loss.⁸

Pastoral care professional, Dr. Ed Wimberly recommends that telling our stories is one way in which to find healing along with telling biblical stories and preaching. He indicated that changing views that people bring to events and relationships can be done through storytelling. Wimberly suggested that stories should be told in a way that the person will be able to see themselves and their circumstances differently. He also indicated that biblical stories can assist in healing by presenting them in a way in which the hearer will be able to see themselves in the text.

I am aware that there are some women who have experienced VPT and have no regrets or psychological challenges. This project is not for those women. This project is for those who have not been allowed to grieve in a way that can help bring healing and closure to them.

Clinical and pastoral care professionals have both indicated that care can be provided to persons experiencing grief by storytelling, both biblical and through their own testimonies. Also, providing persons with the tools to work their way through the different phases of denial and to work through the guilt and shame they have been living with will be my project goal.

Consequently, all of the foundation papers offered will play a specific role in education, as well as offer theological, biblical, and theoretical perspectives to

⁸ Bell Hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1993), 101.

significantly change the subject from guilt and shame to healing and hope for a future. These foundations will offer a holistic approach to healing in mind, body, and spirit.

Though the church addresses healing of grief relating to other losses, the church has not always been a safe place for people who have experienced abortion to find healing. In May 2015, an organization by the name of Care Net commissioned a study entitled “Women Who Have Had an Abortion and Their Views on Church.” An online panel interviewed women who indicated that they had a pregnancy terminated. The study included 1,038 surveys. The following are some of the findings: Seventy percent of the women surveyed who had an abortion indicated their religious preference as Christian. Thirty-six percent of the women who terminated their pregnancies attended a Christian church once a month or more at the time of their first abortion. Sixty-five percent of women who had an abortion agree that church members judge single women who are pregnant. Nearly sixty-four percent of women surveyed agree that church members are more likely to gossip about a woman considering abortion than help her understand her options. More than forty-two percent of women surveyed agreed that pastors teach that God is willing to forgive past abortion decisions. However, half of the women surveyed who had an abortion agree that pastors teaching forgiveness do not seem to apply to terminated pregnancies. More than fifty-two percent of churchgoers who had an abortion report that no one at church knows they terminated a pregnancy.⁹

It is my desire to provide an opportunity to help bring healing to those who have lived with this secret in a setting that allows for healing to begin by supporting each other, listening to each other’s stories and allowing each other the place to grieve and be

⁹ CareNet Research, “Study of Women Who Have Had an Abortion and Their Views on Church,” accessed September 27, 2017, <http://www.carenet.org>.

healed from their guilt and shame. The setting chosen for the project is a weekend retreat.

During the retreat the participants will be allowed to tell their stories. Hear healing narratives in the bible illustrating how God healed different people and transformed their lives. Hear biblical narratives that will help in the facilitation of forgiveness both for them and persons who may have been responsible for the decision they made that impacted their lives. The retreat will also allow them to see themselves in some of the biblical narratives presented to them.

Methodology

The hypothesis is when persons realize that God is able to transform them and begin them on a healing journey by working through issues of unresolved grief, shame and guilt they will be able to move forward into a healthier future.

Data was gathered in many different ways. I attended a retreat in Crown Point, Indiana in November 2016 for my healing. I was then referred to another African American woman who lived in Baltimore, Maryland by the author of *Forbidden Grief* and the developer of Rachel's Vineyard Retreats to assist in bringing this information to the African American community. The site director in Baltimore agreed to become a mentor and allowed me to assist her in facilitating a retreat for healing from abortion in Baltimore.

After attending those two retreats (one in Crown Point, IN, and one in Baltimore, MD) I was able to apply to become a site leader for Rachel's Vineyard retreats in Chicago. At that time there were no sites in Chicago for healing from abortion.

Additionally, those sites that were closest to the Chicago area were Catholic and I am Protestant. After submitting the necessary documentation, I was granted permission to become an interdenominational retreat site in Chicago. After receiving the authorization to become a site and receiving the Leader's Manual, I decided to adapt two of the exercises for African American context. One was the utilization of the music recommended. I chose to use some contemporary gospel music. The other was an exercise regarding touching the hem of Jesus' garment. I chose to do the exercise outside in a garden and have someone actually standing with the garment over them instead of placing the garment on a crucifix.

Contextual associates and other helpers were utilized to purchase props for the exercises, and snacks for the retreat. Others were used to prepare correspondence that was sent out to the participants as well as type programs, certificates, etc. for the retreat. After receiving authorization to becoming a site I was then able to find a retreat center and begin to advertise for the retreat. Flyers were made and passed out. They were also disseminated by email. Flyers were also included in the church bulletin for several Sundays. Additionally, flyers were handed out to persons at a food pantry that is held at my church. I also solicited the assistance of one of my Professional Associates to email flyers to students at a local seminary where she is employed. The seminary gave the permission to contact students and emails were sent out to them. The retreat was also posted on the Rachel's Vineyard website.

A retreat center had to be found, so I asked for recommendations from people about retreat centers. I visited at least three centers before I selected the one we used because I was going to finance the retreat it was important to find a location that was

affordable, comfortable, clean, not too far from public transportation and provided food and lodging. The retreat center that was selected met all of those criteria. One of my mentors recommended the location. The retreat center was perfect for the retreat. It was clean, comfortable, easy to access, and the food was very good.

Weekly telephone conferences were held between the Professional Counselor, facilitator and one of the Professional Associates. During those conferences, updates were given on the status of preparations for the retreat. These telephone conference calls were conducted for approximately one to two months prior to the retreat and lasted about one hour. Meetings were also held with the volunteer assistants and helpers to discuss assignments and tasks. Each meeting opened and closed with prayer.

Once persons expressed an interest in attending, a confidential participant information form was sent to them. The form asked for contact information. Special dietary needs, emergency contact information, what they hoped to gain by attending the retreat. Dates of abortions, and three things they would like the team to know about them. After the Confidential Participant Information was completed and received, they were sent a Participants Agreement committing to confidentiality and to spending the entire weekend.

Implementation

The project was implemented over a weekend September 15-17, 2017. The Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center on the north side of Chicago was the location. It began on Friday evening at 6:00 p.m. and concluded Sunday afternoon at approximately 1:00 p.m. Participants were asked to arrive on Friday at 5:30 p.m. to check in and have a

meal together at 6:00 p.m. Dinner was served from 6:00 – 7:00 p.m. There were six participants in the project. They were: Five women ranging in age from twenty-five to sixty-six and one man in his mid-thirties. One participant is an ordained minister. The participants came from Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana and Tennessee. Also noted is, with the exception of two participants all had carried the guilt and shame of abortion for more than thirty-five years. All of the participants were asked to stay at the retreat center for the entire weekend. Meetings took place in a very comfortable lounge, outside in a garden and in the chapel.

The lounge was set up with two sofas, two coffee tables, several comfortable chairs, and larger tables that were against the wall for snacks, juice and water. The chairs were set up in a circular fashion and the two sofas were pulled into the middle of the room with the chairs so persons could see each other from wherever they sat. The two coffee tables were in the middle of the circle. Boxes of tissues were placed at the side of each chair. A large television and DVD player was also in the room. At all of the meetings in that room, one of the coffee tables was covered with a white table cloth: on it were placed a cross, a large white candle, a lighter and a Bible. The table with the cross, candle and opened Bible remained that way during each exercise. Different prompts were placed on the other coffee table as needed for the exercise being done. During most of the exercises living scriptures and or meditations were read with soft meditative music playing in the background and the lights were either dimmed or off. Contemporary gospel music was also used during moments when people entered into the meeting space.

Pre and post-test surveys were used as one criteria for determining what took place during the weekend retreat. Observations were also made by the project leader,

therapist and professional associate (a psychiatrist) who assisted me in implementing the project. They were instructed to observe changes in the following: participation, body language and facial expressions. Curricula from Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Manual was used. This particular curricula was selected because it utilizes the senses as a means to engage persons in the healing process. In order to use the curricula the project leader was required to attend a retreat for post-abortion healing and afterwards assist in facilitating a retreat for post abortion healing.

Due to the nature of the retreat it was difficult to get people to respond to the invitations that were sent out. The goal was to have six participants. My initial focus was on seminary students. It was my thought that seminary students could attend the retreat and then provide healing to persons they minister to after they graduate. However, none of the seminary students responded to the invitation to participate via email.

Once I was contacted by email or text message by participants that expressed an interest in attending, they were sent an application to complete and send back to me. When the application was completed and emailed back to me, they were sent a letter commended them for making the decision and letting them know we would be praying for them. A Participant Information Form was included with that letter requesting information such as contact information, who to contact in case of emergency, and allergies. Each participant returned the requested information.

To my surprise three of the six people who responded to invitations to the retreat were my relatives, which brought a completely different dynamic to the project. Those who expressed an interest in attending were my family members who had experienced abortion and needed healing, but had kept it a secret for many years. So one by one when

they received the flyer they called and asked if they could attend. One of the participants was concerned because she was also assisting with preparation for the retreat (as one of my contextual associates). When she saw the first names of the participants she decided that she should probably not attend the retreat as a participant (for confidentiality reasons) but agreed to attend as my contextual associate to assist with preparations for the retreat. I really wanted her to attend (for her healing) so I asked her to attend to help me with some clerical work. She agreed to and also agreed to do observations for me so I could have observations submitted from three persons.

On the first night she “participated” in the retreat and advised me the next day that she would not be doing observations because she was in need of healing and wanted to focus on that. I was pleased with her decision because that is what I wanted for her in the first place. Yet another surprise for me was that one of the participants who found out about the retreat through the website asked if she could attend the retreat with her boyfriend. I had only anticipated women attending so I contacted the retreat facility and they made accommodations for a male. He was required to sleep on a different floor designated for males.

In addition to the six participants, present were a therapist, a psychiatrist and an assistant. Prior to the participants arriving, a minister from my church came to the retreat center and prayed in each room where we would be meeting. The lounge where most of the meetings took place was on the same floor as the sleeping rooms making it easy for the participants to access the room. The lounge was also available for persons who wanted to spend time while we were not using it. Each participant made a commitment to stay for the whole weekend.

There are numerous advantages which result from intensive work with no distractions or interruptions from one's work, family life and relationships. It is easier for many individuals to enter the grieving process knowing they don't have to stop it after two hours and return home or to work. . . The primary emphasis on the weekend retreat is entering and moving through the process of grief, recognizing and dealing with anger, mourning the lost child, the renewal of a spiritual life through the Living Scripture exercises and developing a spiritual relationship with the aborted children.¹⁰

On Friday, September 15, 2017, participants began to arrive between 5:00 and 5:30 p.m. and were met by a greeter who showed them to their rooms. In each room the participants found a bag with snacks, a name tag, hand sanitizer, a pen, folder which included a pad of paper, welcome letter, and retreat schedule. A personal note was also written to each of them and was placed on their pillow.

A delicious meal was served at 6:00 p.m. Participants and facilitators shared in a meal together because one table could not accommodate the whole group, the three facilitators sat together. After dinner one of the participants asked, "Why didn't you eat with us?" We told her that there was not enough room at the table, however, we would make sure that at least one of us would sit with them from then on. After the first meal, at least one of the facilitators sat at the table with the other participants.

Though everyone was cordial, tension was very high in the dining room as people ate, not really knowing what was ahead for them for the weekend. The participant whose boyfriend was going to be attending advised me that he had to work late and would be coming later.

At 7:00 p.m., the meeting began. By the time we met, the male participant had arrived. I welcomed each person and thanked them for coming. The facilitators,

¹⁰ Theresa Burke, *Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Interdenominational Weekend Retreat Manual* (Staten Island, NY: Self-published, 1999), 12.

professional counselors and helpers were introduced. Also, a staff member from the retreat facility came in to welcome us and give us logistical information. When the staff member left, I explained to them that the retreat had two purposes. The first was to bring healing to those impacted by abortion. The second was to provide research for my doctoral project. Each person had already been explained that over the telephone when they expressed interest to attending the retreat prior to being sent the application. I also explained during the initial telephone conversation that the participants would be asked to complete a survey of questions before the retreat and at the end of it. I also advised them that if there was a time when they needed someone to talk to one of the facilitators would be available.

After pre-surveys were done, each person was invited to introduce themselves, share a little about them, (what kind of work they do, children, marital status, etc.) Tell us how they heard about the retreat and what they were hoping to get out of it. During this time, placed around the coffee table along with the Bible, candle and cross were ten large rocks (about the size of two fists). Each rock weighed about two and a half pounds.

After introductions were made, scripture that was read was John 8:1-11. After the scripture was read soft music played in the background and the participants were asked to close their eyes, take a deep breath and listen to a meditation. Each meditation utilized in the exercises were written to compliment the scripture. What the meditation does is puts you in the place of whoever the scripture is talking about. For example, this particular scripture was about the woman who was caught in adultery and brought to Jesus to be stoned. The meditation is written for persons to hear it as if they are the woman who was brought to Jesus. At the end of the meditation Jesus tells the people who want to stone the

woman to death, “Let the one among you who is without sin throw the first stone.” Of course no one could throw the stone so they all put their stones down and walked away. Jesus then asked the woman, “Where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No sir,” she replies. Then Jesus says, “Neither do I condemn you, Go, and from now on do not sin anymore.” After the scripture and meditation are read, while the soft music continues to play, the facilitator picks up one of the rocks and says, “This rock is heavy, it is probably the kind of rock the people used to stone others back in the time of Jesus. We are going to pass this rock around our circle as we re-enact Jesus’ words.” The facilitator then picks up the rock and hands it to the person to her right and says, “Is there anyone here to condemn you? The persons being handed the rock will respond: “No one.” The facilitator will then say “Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.”¹¹ Each person who received the rock will hand it to the person to their right and repeat the dialogue until everyone has had the rock. The facilitators and helpers also participate in this exercise until everyone has had the rock. This exercise is done to show that there will be no condemnation during the retreat. Group discussions followed by asking how the person felt during the meditation. Asking if they could see themselves in the meditation? What were their thoughts when they were handed the rock? The answers varied from they felt sorry for the woman, to I felt that everyone there had sinned and therefore no one had a right to throw the rock at her.

The next assignment was to invite each participant to pick one of the rocks off the table. They each selected a rock. Once the rock had been selected they were told that the rock they picked represents something in their life that is a burden to them. Un-

¹¹ Burke, *Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Manual*, 61.

forgiveness, condemnation, and guilt were possible examples. They were advised that they would have to carry the rock around with them throughout the retreat. The rock must be taken with them every place they go. To the bathroom, shower, to bed, to meals. Where ever they go, they must carry the rock. Carrying the rock everywhere they go is to remind them of how difficult it is to carry around their burdens. However, when they are tired of carrying the rock around, all they have to say is, "I am ready to give up my rock." At that time, they will name what it is they are putting down. None of the rocks were turned in on the first night. One participant took two rocks before she realized she would have to carry them around with her everywhere she went. However, after she picked up the rocks she let us know her burdens were just that heavy.

The Blind Man

The second coffee table is covered with a white cloth. Small taper candles are available for each person on the table. All of the lights were turned off and readers used small flashlights. The large white candle on the table is lit and it is the only light in the room. Soft meditative instrumental music is playing in the background. The healing scripture read for this exercise is Mark 10:46-52. The story is about Jesus healing Bartimaeus, a blind man as he sat by the road side begging. In the scripture Jesus asked the man "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus replied "I want to see." Jesus told him "Go your way; your faith has saved you." The man was healed immediately.

After hearing the healing scripture, the participants are invited to close their eyes, relax in their chairs and take a deep breath. They are instructed to imagine that they are sitting on the roadside, blind, lonely and begging. The living scripture is re-enacted by

the participants. When they hear Jesus coming they will have the opportunity to call out to him by saying, “Jesus, have pity on me.” And when Jesus responds “What do you want me to do for you?” The participant then tells Jesus what they want him to do. The facilitator walks up to the participant and calls them by name, saying “Take courage, He is calling you.” They are then invited to say “Jesus, son of David, have pity of me.” After they have said those words the facilitator will extend his or her hand placing it on their head and say, “What do you want me to do for you?” After they respond they are given a lighted taper candle. Calling each person by name they are told “Receive the light of Christ.” A prayer is offered and at the end of each exercise a group discussion occurs. Some of the questions asked were? “Could you imagine yourself in the scripture? How did it feel to know that Jesus was approaching you?”¹² Responses were, “I felt as if Jesus was close by.” “I was not able to relax.” “I don’t feel any different.”

A thirty minute video “Dear Children” is played.

This video is interviews of men, women and couples struggling with the painful reality of abortion. It gives excellent information on post-abortion syndrome and introduces the concept of letter writing to the babies lost in abortion. . .the movie lays the groundwork for some of the grief work which will be accomplished later in the weekend retreat.¹³

Cup of Bitterness

This is an exercise that serves for Friday night’s ending. Matthew 20:22 is read: “Can you drink the cup of suffering that I am going to drink?” Each participant is handed a cup with a light colored grape juice in it and asked to pour some of it into a pitcher as

¹² Burke, *Rachel’s Vineyard Retreat Manual*, 69.

¹³ Burke, *Rachel’s Vineyard Retreat Manual*, 73.

they relate some things they are having a difficult time with. Anything they consider to be bitter can be poured into the cup. Whatever is bitter and difficult they are to pour into the cup saying “Into this cup I pour my (whatever is bitter to them) e.g., low self-esteem.”

When everyone has poured into the cup, they are told, “As sisters and brothers in Christ we will share in each other’s bitterness.” Letting them know they are not alone. They are then led in a prayer that asks God for the grace to face life with honesty on the weekend. The prayer closes thanking Christ for the privilege of sharing in the cup of bitterness with our brothers and sisters in Christ. They are then told that God wants to redeem this bitterness and transform it into the cup of blessing. The transformation of the cup is done by sharing in Holy Communion together. We close by reciting The Lord’s Prayer together. The first night of the retreat is over. The participants are given instructions for meeting the next morning for breakfast.

On Saturday morning, September 16, 2017, breakfast began at 8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. Every one met for breakfast. It was observed that some of the participants were bonding with each other. It appeared that participants were a little more comfortable talking with each other than the previous night. When breakfast was over, we met back in the lounge.

Group Sharing

The room is still set up circular and everyone is invited to tell their life’s story. At this time instructions were given to reflect on your entire life. The participants are instructed to do the following: think about their family life, childhood, the different ways in which their family communicated with each other. Was there any kind of substance

abuse, abuse, or divorce? They were also invited to tell the story about their abortion.

How old they were? How they made the decision, etc.

The therapist, facilitator and I were the first to tell our stories in an effort to make others more comfortable with sharing theirs. Each person was instructed to limit their story to twenty minutes. Each person told their story. As they were telling their story, discomfort could be seen on many of their faces. Not just in the faces of those who were telling their stories, but in some of those who were listening. Some of them were shifting positions in their seats. Some wrung their hands as they shared or folded and unfolded a napkin. Most of them cried as they told their story. When one of the participants cried, one of the other participants (who had by that time connected with them) would ask if they could give them a hug. They cried with each other, hugged each other and supported each other through the story telling exercise. Each participant listened intently to the other person's story. Each person also shared openly. During that time more than one of them confessed that they felt as if God would not forgive them for what they had done. This session was very emotional. During the sharing, one of the participants hurried out of the room. The therapist went out to talk with her. They returned after a few minutes.

When the male participant told his story, it was surprising to hear him share so openly about his experience with abortion because he had insisted that his girlfriend have the abortion. He indicated that he married his first wife when they had just completed high school because she was pregnant and the marriage did not work. So when his current girlfriend became pregnant he felt as if he was reliving what happened to him when he was a teenager. He said he was feeling trapped. He insisted that his girlfriend have the abortion. After he insisted she have the abortion, there was strong tension between them

so they did not talk for a few days. During those days that they did not communicate, after thinking about it he had a change of heart and called to tell her he thought she should have the baby. However, by the time he called her it was too late. The abortion had been performed the day before. Hearing a male perspective was very enlightening and he said listening to the stories of the other female participants, made him feel bad because he had no idea how much hurt abortion causes women. He also indicated that attending the retreat allowed him to come to terms with the pain the abortion of his child was causing him.

On Saturday Afternoon the lunch was held from 12:00 – 1:00 p.m. When we returned from lunch those who had not had an opportunity, finished telling their stories. When story telling was done, they were instructed to take out their journals and a pen and make a list of people who they had unresolved issues with. The list of people would include people who hurt them in some way. Once their lists were completed, they were instructed to write a letter to someone on their list. The letters were to express the pain they received from that person and how it affected them. They were told to write the letter to anyone of their choosing and they would be reading the letters during the next session. They were given a one-hour break to write the letters.

Sharing the Letters

When the participants returned the chairs were still configured in a circle but there were also two chairs facing each other in the middle. Each person was invited to tell who they wrote their letter to and to read it out loud. After each person read their letter they were asked, how they felt reading their letter. They each expressed their feelings: anger,

relief, hurt, betrayal, and sadness. When each person finished reading their letter the therapist, facilitator sat in one of the two chairs that were facing each other and invited the person to sit in the other chair. They then did a role play with the therapist playing the role of the person who had wounded or hurt the person writing the letter.

According to the *Leader's Retreat Manual*, these are the phases the role play should move through: express hurt (the person has an opportunity to express their hurt); validate pain (The other person can validate what has been shared by agreeing, "You're right I can see that I really hurt you," respond to validation (allow the person to react to what has been shared); apologize (The offending person must make an attempt to say how sorry they are for what they have done); ask for forgiveness (the offending person will ask for forgiveness); accept apology (if the person is willing to, it should not be forced); affirm (the offender is to tell the person of the good qualities they see in him or her such as strength. Reconciliation (Roleplay of reconciliation should end with a hug if the person wants to receive a hug).¹⁴

Role play was done by each participant and the therapist. When the female participant who brought her boyfriend read her letter, her letter had been written to her boyfriend. The therapist suggested he sit in the chair and role play with her. It was very awkward for them, but the female participant was able to articulate her anger and hurt and the male participant was able to sit through it and provide words of affirmation at the end. The therapist coached the couple through this exercise. One participant indicated that after she wrote her letter of anger, she decided to take a picture of it with her phone and send it to the person she was angry with. When this exercise ended the participants each talked about how the exercise made them feel. If they could identify with any of the role players. How it felt to watch the role playing? Some of the following were responses. "I was able to say some things I wanted to say for a long time, but never had the chance." "I feel better since I got that off my chest." "Relieved."

¹⁴ Burke, *Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Manual*, 91-92.

One participant during Saturday's session continued to express her inability to receive forgiveness for her abortions and other things that had happened in her life. She continued to talk about how she did not like the way she looked. How God would not forgive her for what she had done because she knew what she was doing. How what she had done was so bad she felt that she was not worth forgiving. She indicated that she knew she was loved by her children, but was not worthy to receive love from anyone else. This participant happened to be a member of my church and also a relative. She had spent much of the time during the retreat crying and speaking disparagingly about herself. She was also the person who picked up two rocks to carry around because her burdens were so heavy. After sharing the anger letters, as we were sitting around talking about how everyone felt, she continued to talk about how she could not be forgiven, when one of the facilitators said, "What about David in the Bible? He had an adulterous relationship and had the woman's husband killed, yet God forgave him. You do not think God could forgive you? What you did was no worse than him." "What about Paul? He persecuted Christians, and God forgave him." At that time, I stood up, slowly walked over to the participant and said to her, "What about your pastor? You listen to me preach every Sunday, you have participated in Bible Study and I had abortions. Do you think God has not forgiven me?" Just then it seemed as if a light went off in her mind. She looked up at me with tears in her eyes. I bent down and embraced her as we cried together. It was at that moment, that she realized that God had forgiven her. To God be the glory! That was a major breakthrough! She finally realized that God could forgive her. The atmosphere in the room felt lighter.

The next living scripture exercise was done outside in a small garden. The retreat facility had a beautiful garden that was noticed as we went for a walk during lunch. The living scripture exercise was taken from Luke 8:40-48.

The chairs were arranged in a circle with soft music playing in the garden. It was in the early afternoon so the sun was still shining. It was a very beautiful day. The temperature was about seventy-five degrees. The facilitators and participants sat in the circle while the scripture was being read. I stayed behind and covered myself with a piece of cloth that resembled that of biblical days. While the scripture was being read I walked outside wearing the cloth. The healing scripture was the story of the women who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years and heard that Jesus was in town. She touched the hem of his garment and her bleeding immediately stopped. When Jesus realized that the woman had touched him he called her "Daughter," and told her "Your faith has saved you, go in peace."

Meditation for Living Scripture

When the meditation was read for the living scripture, the participants were invited to take a few deep breaths, close their eyes and relax. They were then invited to imagine being the woman who had been bleeding all of those years. They were to imagine that Jesus has now come in. By that time I was standing just few feet away from them with the cloth covering me. The reader says, "Jesus is passing you now, this will be your moment to be healed, but you must reach out and touch his cloak." They are then invited to reflect on the area of their life that may be bleeding. The part that may be hemorrhaging. Each person is invited to approach the cloak, reach out and touch it and

say a short prayer. They are to ask Jesus to heal their wounds where they are bleeding. Each person then touches the cloth and says, "Lord please heal my _____. The response is "Your faith has saved you, Go in peace."

At the end of the exercise the group sat in the garden and talked about how the exercise effected each person. The young lady who brought her boyfriend said, she is not religious and was not feeling what she thought some of the others were feeling during the exercises. We thanked her for her honesty and for participating anyway. Her male partner said he felt as if he had been forgiven. Many persons expressed that the exercise had a positive impact on them. Maybe it was because they were able to touch the cloth. Maybe it was because it was so beautiful in the garden. Maybe it was the wind moving the cloth as it was draped over me. God was producing some awesome "special effects." The cloth exercise seemed to have a profound effect on many of the participants. Participants had free time after the exercise and were invited to meet at 6:00 p.m. for dinner and everyone dined together.

When the participants returned on Saturday evening, soft music was playing. A very large crystal punch bowl filled with water was sitting on the coffee table in the middle of the circle of chairs. A glass pitcher filled with water was also on the table. Flowers and greenery were placed around the bowl. The punch bowl was there to represent Jacob's well where Jesus met the woman from Samaria.

The living scripture was John 4:4-30, which depicts the story of the woman at the well. The story is read of Jesus sitting at the well when a woman came to draw water from the well. He asked her for a drink of water, because they were from different ethnic backgrounds she indicated her surprise that he would ask her for a drink. He told her that

if she only knew what God gives and who it was asking her for a drink, she would ask him and he would give her living water. After some dialogue about their ancestors, she asked where she could get the living water. Jesus responded that whoever drinks of the water in the well would be thirsty again; but whoever drinks of the living water will never thirst again. She became interested and let him know she wanted some of the living water. Jesus then began to inquire about her marital status. She was honest with Jesus and Jesus began to tell her some things about her personal life that she knew he should not have known about her. She concluded that he must be a prophet. Their conversation then shifted to worship. She mentioned that Messiah would come, Jesus informed her that he was the Messiah. The disciples returned and the woman left, leaving her water jar and water and went back to her community telling the people, “Come see a man who told her everything about myself. Could he be the Messiah?”

Meditation – Participants are invited to sit back in a relaxed position, close their eyes and take in deep breaths as they focus on the grace of God, and breathe out negativity. Breathe in peace and mercy, breath out doubts and condemnation. Breathe in the love of God, breathe out unbelief, tension and stress. Participants are invited to picture themselves at the well in Samaria as the person carrying the water jar up to the well. They are to imagine the burden of the weight of the jar. They are to imagine themselves as someone who had numerous bad marriages and none of them have worked. Imagine the sun is hot and the walk is long. Imagine getting to the well and seeing a man sitting there who asked you for a drink of water. The man looks deeply into your eyes and begins to speak. He tells you things no one else knows about but you. But he does not speak to you with a tone of condemnation. You are actually quite at peace with him. Jesus tells you about living water. How you will never be thirsty again. He talks about eternal life. The parched areas within your soul have been moistened. You feel a strange sense of joy and wonder. You are not the same as you were when you first approached him. Your heart understands. You can’t wait to tell other people that you finally met someone who has what you’ve always needed. You are no longer thirsty. You no longer have to settle for abusive relationships to get love. From now on you will proclaim “Jesus is Lord. He will give us living water! Jesus knows all about me, yet he loves me still!”¹⁵

¹⁵ Burke, *Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Manual*, 97.

All attendees are invited to pour water in the bowl from the pitcher to symbolize life in Christ as living water. As they pour water into the bowl they are to say “Lord Jesus, I accept your living water.” All participants then stood together holding hands around the bowl of water and prayed thanking God for the gift of living water. We thanked God for reaching out to us and we thanked God for the gift of eternal life where we will be able to be with Christ forever.

Pouring Our Hearts to the Lord

The punch bowl is left on the table filled with the water from the woman at the well exercise. Small floating candles are also on the table along with the large white candle that is lit. These candles are placed on the table around the punch bowl. The participants are reminded that the large white candle represents the Light of Christ. Soft music is playing. As each person is seated in the circle a poem entitled “Whispers from Heaven” is given to them. The poem represents a letter written to each mother and or father from their child. In the poem, the child lets them know that they forgive them and that they are with God. The poem encourages the mother and or father to name them, to not be sad, and to know that they will be there when God brings them home to heaven. The letter is signed “Your Child.” The poem is read to them by one of the facilitators while they read along. Many of the participants cried while the letter was read.

Naming the Children

Participants are then told that in the next exercise they would have the opportunity to name their children. They are encouraged to choose a name for each child they have

lost through abortion and miscarriage. They are instructed to ask God to reveal the baby to them. They are given a few moments to reflect on the child. They are encouraged to take a few moments to pray and come up with a name for their lost children. The facilitator says, “You have each accepted the Living Water of Christ - - this is the promise of everlasting life. God wants each of your children to share that life as well - - and He wants it even more than you do!”¹⁶ “This ritual signifies that we name and acknowledge our children and we offer them to God our Creator. When you approach the bowl say: “Lord, I pour out my heart to you - - I give you (name of baby).” “Light a candle to signify the life and light of your child and place it in the living water of Christ.”¹⁷

Each person then lit a floating candle and placed it in the water as they named the child and dedicated the child to Christ. After the candles were lit and each child named, the participants were invited to hold hands around the “Well of Jacob.” Where Jesus offered us Living Water, the promise of grace and everlasting life. As everyone stood around the bowl holding hands, I invited them to listen to a song, “Psalm 121 My Help” playing softly in the background. As everyone stood quietly around the table holding hands, looking at the floating candles it seemed as if the flames were flickering to the tempo of the music. Everyone stood together in silent reflection and watched the candles melt together as the flames continued to flicker. The moment felt very sacred. We all hugged when the song ended.

¹⁶ Burke, *Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Manual*, 103.

¹⁷ Burke, *Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Manual*, 105.

A closing prayer was given, offering God our children. The children had been named and recognized as God's children. The prayer acknowledged that they were created in the image of God and God's likeness; that they were unique and that Jesus died for them. We thanked God for realizing the truth that our children belong to God and are in His hands of mercy.¹⁸ At the end of the prayer, the group was invited to lead the group in a song. One of the participant led the group in "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands."

By late Saturday all but one person had turned in their rocks. When each person gave up their rock we applauded them. They were then encouraged to tell us what they had named the rock they were turning in. One person named their rock after their mother. One named their rock "guilt." One participant named their rock "betrayal." As they turned in their rock, I would give them a Bible and say, "We are so proud of you for deciding not to carry that rock around anymore. Now you can replace (whatever they named the rock) with the word of God.

Meeting Our Children with Christ

The living scripture was John 14:1-6. The lounge is still set up in a circle. The large white candle continues to burn in the middle of the table. On the tables surrounding the walls are fresh, wild flowers gathered in small bouquets. The scripture reading is the text where Jesus tells his disciples not to be troubled, if they believe in God, they believe in him. He tells them that he is going to prepare a place to receive them to himself. The

¹⁸ Burke, *Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Manual*, 110.

scripture talks about the many mansions in His Father's house and he concludes with "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him."

All participants are invited to close their eyes. They are instructed to get comfortable and to breathe deeply. They are told to breathe in the mercy of our Lord. Breathe out any feelings of darkness. Breathe in the tenderness of Jesus. Breathe out any fear of apprehension. Breathe in the hope of Jesus Christ. Breathe out any despair. Breathe in the love of God and all His mercy. Breathe out any feeling of shame.¹⁹

The participants are invited to imagine they are in the middle of a dark forest, frightened and tired. All of a sudden, they see a light that is unfamiliar to them. As they approach the light they are able to hear birds singing and they can smell the scent of wild flowers. They suddenly realize they are no longer in darkness.

In the forest as they approach the light they see a man playing with children all around him. That man is Jesus. As the children approach Jesus, he welcomes them and brings them close to him. The little children surround Jesus. He then bends down and picks up one of the children and hands the child to you saying, "This is your child." You realize that the child is yours. The child even has some of your characteristics. As you hold the child you realize how safe and happy the child is with Jesus.

After you hold the child for a while Jesus comes and takes the child away from you and embraces you again. The child runs off to play with the other children. Shortly after that the child comes to you with flowers that were picked for you and says, "Here Mommy and or Daddy these are for you. I picked them for you because I love you. I want you to know that Jesus loves you too. I am happy here, Jesus has so much love to give us. Do not worry about me, someday we will be together." The little child hands you the

¹⁹ Burke, *Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Manual*, 113.

flowers as a remembrance of the love you share together.²⁰ As the narrative is being read, two of the attendants are walking around placing flowers in the hands of the participants. When the participants are instructed to open their eyes they are holding a small, bouquet of wild flowers. The participants are then reminded of Jesus' promise to stay with them. They are reminded that Jesus walks with them and guides them on the right trail. They are told to stay close to him and he will never leave them. Participants are then invited to share their reflections and experiences during the meditation. They are also asked if it was hard to leave the scene when it was time to go. Some said the scene was so comfortable they hated to leave it. Some said it was very peaceful and very comforting. One participant said they felt like they could feel their child's presence.

Closing prayer

Thanks God for a renewed sense of peace. Thanks God for the hope and courage promised of everlasting life. Thanks God for meeting with us and introducing us to our children and giving us the confidence that our child is with God in heaven and someday we will meet again.²¹

Handing out of Bereavement Dolls

The participants are then given a chance to select bereavement dolls for the memorial service the next morning. They are able to pick a doll for each pregnancy loss. The memorial dolls come in different hues. Some are light brown, some medium brown

²⁰ Burke, *Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Manual*, 115.

²¹ Burke, *Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Manual*, 117.

and some dark brown. Participants were invited to keep the dolls with them overnight. However, they were instructed not to do anything to the dolls because they would be used at the Memorial Service the next morning. Memorial service information cards were also passed out so each person could write down the names of their children who will be honored at the memorial service Sunday morning. When the cards are turned back in, a team member took the list and printed the names of the babies on the cover for the Memorial Service booklet and also put them on Certificates of Life to be given to the parents at the memorial service. The memorial service cards are collected.

Before closing the participants were given instructions to reflect on the meaning of their child's life and write a letter to each child they had lost. The letter should be written as they reflect on what they may have learned since the loss of their child. Their letters are of love and they may say anything they want to the child. They were advised that they may write a letter, a poem, a song, or perform a dance. Whatever expression they wanted to make regarding the child. They were given the rest of the evening as free time. Participants were also instructed to begin to pack because immediately after the Memorial Service there would be a short reception to complete the post-surveys and then we would be preparing to leave. On Sunday morning, September 17, 2017, breakfast was served at 8:00 a.m. After breakfast we met in the lounge. The room was set up circular.

Group Discussion

Each participant was asked to share how they felt about their experience that weekend; whether or not they were afraid to leave the retreat? The participants were told that later in the week they might feel a little depressed. If that happens they should know

that what they are going through is normal. I told them I was glad the therapist at the retreat I attended provided that information because in the middle of the week, I felt a little depressed and remembered what had been told to me and it helped her to cope with it better. Each person spoke about their experiences and some felt that they would lose what they had experienced after they return to “the real world.” The participant who expressed earlier that she could not feel what we were feeling because she was not religious said, during the naming of the baby ceremony as we stood in a circle together all looking at the floating candles listening to the song she actually felt touched by that exercise. We were glad that she experienced “something.”

Affirmations

There was a bowl that had each person’s name written on a small, folded piece of paper. The participants were invited to draw a name out of the bowl, look at the person whose name they had and tell them something positive they observed about them over the weekend. This exercise was very well received as we gave positive affirmations to each other. At the end of our affirmation exercise, our male participant told us he was ready to turn his rock in. We applauded him and he received his Bible.

Instructions were given about what would take place at the Memorial Service. They were encouraged to make sure they brought with them letters to their children so they would be read at the Memorial Service. As well as their bereavement dolls. A contact sheet was passed out so they could be in contact with each other (if they wanted to). They were reminded that the information was confidential and strictly voluntary. We were then told when to meet in the chapel.

Sunday Memorial Service

The chapel was beautifully decorated with flowers. On a small table in the front was the large white candle, the cross and the Bible. On the altar was a large wicker cradle with a white pillow and blanket inside. Red roses were placed around the cradle. The following is the order of service: Welcome, opening prayer, scripture, a musical selection (Yesterday, by Mary Mary) was sung by our guest soloist.

Memorial Service

Each person came to the podium and read the letters written to their children. After the letters were read, each person placed their bereavement dolls in the cradle. Placing the dolls in the cradle was symbolic to giving their children back to God. After the dolls were placed in the cradle, the parents were able to say a prayer. After the prayer, a memorial candle was lit for each child being honored. Each parent was then given an angel pin for each child memorialized. In addition to the angel pen, a "Certificate of Life" was given to each parent with the child's name on it. The parents were reminded that they are in a safe place to grieve. The purpose of the Memorial Service was to provide closure. The closing song for the memorial was "Break Every Chain" by Tasha Cobbs. "There is power in the name of Jesus, to break every chain, break every chain, break every chain!"

I preached a sermon from Mark 1:40-45 entitled "Touched by the Master." The narrative was about a man who had leprosy. When he met Jesus he said, "If you are willing you can make me clean." Jesus said, "I am willing, be clean." He reached out and

touched the man and he was healed immediately. In the message, Jesus' ability to heal in many different ways was discussed. Sometimes he healed people from a distance. Sometimes he just spoke a word and they were healed, but every now and again Jesus knows that people need a touch from Him. So he not only spoke a word to the leper but he also touched him. The leper needed to be touched. At the end of the message I said, "I hope the Master has touched you in some way or another this weekend." The invitation was extended to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. During the invitation each participant was invited to close their eyes and bow their heads. When the invitation was given the couple raised their hands and I went over and prayed with them. The benediction was given concluding the service.

Everyone was asked to meet back in the lounge for refreshments and to complete the post surveys. We met back in the lounge and post surveys were passed out. Everyone was served homemade desserts, water and juice. The post-surveys were completed and passed out. The retreat ended at approximately 1:30 p.m. everyone hugged and prayed for safe journeys to our destinations.

Summary of Learning

The success of the project was measured through qualitative analysis utilizing observations, pre-surveys, post-surveys and interviews. These measures were implemented to determine the impact of guilt and shame associated with the voluntary pregnancy termination prior to the retreat, during the retreat and after the retreat. The observers were asked to observe the following from the attendees: participation, facial expression and body language. Though I asked the observers to observe the above, I did

not give them a uniform way in which to write their observations up, consequently they provided the information, in different formats. However, they were able to document what was requested of them. Finally, interviews were taken three months after the retreat to determine continuity of healing after the retreat.

Pre-Post Surveys

The participants were given a pre-survey to complete at the beginning of the retreat. The survey was to determine if there was any movement in the retreatant's responses before and after the retreat. There were six persons who participated. It was observed that there were some changes in the way the participants answered some of the questions before and after the retreat. The following are my conclusions after comparing pre and post surveys.

Question One: I believe God will forgive anything I ask for forgiveness. In the pre-survey, two people answered "always," three answered "sometimes" and one did not answer. In the post-survey asking the same question five of the six people answered "always" and one did not answer. Showing that those who answered "sometimes" change their answer to "always" at the end of the retreat.

Question Two: I believe abortion can cause persons to have guilt and shame. In the pre-survey, five people answered always, one answered sometimes. In the post survey all six answered always. Only one person changed their answer to this question

Question Three: When I had my abortion, I did not feel anyone could understand how I felt. In the pre-survey, five answered always, one answered never. The post-survey indicated four people answered always, two answered sometimes.

Question Four: I believe abortion is a choice women should have a right to make. The pre-survey indicated that five people answered always, one person answered sometimes. In the post-survey two answered always, three answered sometimes and one answered never. After the retreat three of the people who thought women should always have a right to make the choice to have an abortion changed their minds and one person thought a woman should never have a right to make the choice.

Question Five: I thought abortion would change my life for the better. The pre-survey indicated that three answered always, one answered sometimes and two answered never. The post survey indicated that one answered always, two answered sometimes and three answered never.

Question Six: I still experience guilt from abortion. The pre-survey indicated that three answered always and three answered sometimes. The post survey indicated that three answered sometimes and three answered never. Three people changed from “sometimes” to “never” regarding guilt from abortion.

Question Seven: I believe I should not ask for forgiveness if I know what I am doing is wrong. Pre-survey two answered always, two answered sometimes, and two answered never. The post-survey indicated two answered sometimes and four answered never. Two people changed their answer from sometimes to never regarding whether they could ask for forgiveness knowing what they did was wrong.

Question Eight: I never thought about the abortion after it happened. The pre-survey indicated that one person answered always, two answered sometimes and three answered never. The post-survey indicated that one answered always, two answered sometimes,

and three answered never. There was no change in answers to this question at the end of the retreat.

Question Nine: Professional help will help my faith foundation. Pre-survey answers were three persons answered always, and three answered sometimes. Post-survey answers were six answered always. Three additional people felt that professional help would help their faith foundation.

Question Ten: Telling my story is therapeutic or helpful for me. Pre-survey, three answered always, two answered sometimes and one answered do not know. The post-survey responses were six answered always. Three people after the retreat felt that telling their story was therapeutic or helpful for them.

Pre-Retreat Questions

1. I believe God will forgive anything if I ask for forgiveness.
(Always (2) – Sometimes (3) - Never) (0) No Answer (1)
2. I believe abortion can cause persons to have guilt and shame.
Always (5) - Sometimes (1) – Never (0)
3. When I had my abortion, I did not feel anyone could understand how I felt.
Always (5) - Sometimes (0) – Never (1)
4. I believe abortion is a choice women should have a right to make.
Always (5) - Sometimes (1) – Never (0)
5. I thought an abortion would change my life for the better.
Always (3) - Sometimes (1) – Never (2)
6. I still experience guilt from the abortion.
Always (3) - Sometimes (3) – Never (0)
7. I believe I should not ask for forgiveness if I know what I am doing is wrong.
Always (2) - Sometimes (2) – Never (2)
8. I never thought about the abortion again after it happened.

(Always (1) - Sometimes (2) – Never (3))

9. Professional help will help my faith foundation
Always (3) - Sometimes (3) – Never (0)
10. Telling my story is therapeutic or helpful for me.
Always (3) - Sometimes (2) – Never (0) – Don't know (1)

Post-Retreat Questions

1. I believe God will forgive anything if I ask for forgiveness.
(Always (5) – Sometimes (0) - Never (0) No Answer (1))
2. I believe abortion can cause persons to have guilt and shame.
Always (6) - Sometimes (0) – Never (0)
3. When I had my abortion, I did not feel anyone could understand how I felt.
Always (4) - Sometimes (2) – Never (0)
4. I believe abortion is a choice women should have a right to make.
Always (2) - Sometimes (3) – Never (1)
5. I thought an abortion would change my life for the better.
Always (1) - Sometimes (2) – Never (3)
6. I still experience guilt from the abortion.
Always (0) - Sometimes (3) – Never (3)
7. I believe I should not ask for forgiveness if I know what I am doing is wrong.
Always (0) - Sometimes (2) – Never (4)
8. I never thought about the abortion again after it happened.
(Always (1) - Sometimes (2) – Never (3))
9. Professional help will help my faith foundation
Always (6) - Sometimes (0) – Never (0)
10. Telling my story is therapeutic or helpful for me.
Always (6) - Sometimes (0) – Never (0)

In summary, the pre and post-surveys indicated that there was some movement in the responses after the retreat. By the end of the weekend, five of the six participants believed God would forgive anything they asked for. All six participants believed

abortion could cause persons to have guilt and shame. Three persons indicated that they no longer experience guilt after the retreat. All attendees answered that professional help would help build their faith foundation. All of the participants at the end of the retreat indicated that telling their story was therapeutic or helpful to them. I believe some of the questions in the pre and post survey could have been asked in a different way to give better, more easily determined answers. For an example, the question “I never thought about the abortion again after it happened” could have better been answered by a yes or no.

John Creswell in his book *Research Design* said,
 “A qualitative observation is when the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site. In these field notes, the researcher records, in an unstructured or semistructured way (using some prior questions that the inquirer wants to know), activities at the research site. Qualitative observers may also engage in roles varying from a nonparticipant to a complete participant.”²²

The observers had to make mental notes of the participants because they were also helping to facilitate the retreat. The following are their observations:

Observer One

Participation: “I noticed that all of the participants except one voluntarily responded to the questions and shared their stories. One participant needed coaxing throughout the process. She was quiet but engaged during the retreat. She did respond when asked, and she was thoughtful and deliberate in her sharing. One participant often spoke first when questions were asked. She appeared to be in noticeable pain as she shared the difficult moments of her life. Of note, she had to be coaxed during one aspect of the retreat to share a part of her story. She initially passed on sharing but she eventually told her story and she was quite open and candid.”

Facial Expressions: “At the beginning of the retreat, the participants all appeared to be very anxious and apprehensive about what was going to happen. Several of them also appeared sad and depressed. They all displayed good eye contact, and when their colleagues were sharing their stories, they were focused on what was being said. One was noted to be sitting on the edge of her seat during the times of

²² John W. Creswell, *Research Design*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 190.

story sharing. Tears were abundant during the times of sharing their stories. They were shed by both the retreatant who shared and those who were listening. As the program progressed, one at a time, the retreatants' facial expressions changed from anxiety and sadness to more relaxed, with smiles and laughter increasing as time went on. One by one they reported that they were feeling better as the retreat progressed and this was reflected in the brightening of their affects."

Body Language: "At the beginning of the retreat, the participants greeted one another and the staff with smiles and handshakes. They all displayed good eye contact, although there was noticeable anxiety among them. When one of them shared his or her story, she (he) became fidgety, either by shaking her legs, folding and unfolding a tissue on her lap or other repetitive movements of her hands. Their eyes became downcast and they became tearful. Between sessions, the retreatants appeared relaxed and they interacted with the staff and with each other. By the end of the retreat, the participants were smiling and laughing, and singing at times. Even the retreatant who was the most reticent seemed brighter and less anxious, although she remained quiet and somewhat guarded. This particular retreatant appeared angry at times. She sat in her chair, poised on the edge of her seat. She occasionally shook her fingers at or raised her voice toward the person to whom she was speaking. She also expressed a great deal of anger toward herself. In fact, most of her anger was directed toward herself. This particular retreatant had a significant breakthrough during the retreat, and her facial expressions changed dramatically from sad and angry to smiling and relaxed. Her tears of sadness were transformed into tears of joy. The retreatants' body language and facial expressions noticeably changed by the end of the retreat. Although they all participated during the retreat, by the end they were much more relaxed and spontaneous."

Observer Two

Initial Meeting held on September 15, 2017. Behavior observed: poor eye contact – most members; emotionally guarded – all members; supportive of fellow members – some members; fidgety and restless – some members; pressured speech pattern – some members; restricted display of emotion – most members.

"When working with group members" (Saturday, September 16, 2017). Behavior Observed - Improved eye contact with team and group – All members. Openly shared relevant thoughts and feelings – Most members. Supportive of fellow group members – Most members. Less fidgety, but agitated when sharing – Most members. Normal speech rate/softer volume – Most members. Depressed/Anxious/Anger/Remorse/Freer display of emotions – All members. Emotional eating (increased snack consumption) - All members."

Closing Ceremony (Sunday, September 17, 2017). Behavior Observed: Good eye contact with team and group – All members; openly shared thoughts and feelings – all members; supportive of fellow group members – all members; appeared to

be relaxed and peaceful – all members; normal speech rate/volume increased – most members; relieved, content, joyful and regret? (displayed fuller range of emotions) – all members.

On Friday when the retreat began, observations about the retreatants was all of them appeared to be anxious, apprehensive, very little eye contact, some even appeared to be depressed. Some appeared to be reluctant to participate. By the end of the retreat all attendees showed improved eye contact. They were openly participating. Observing their facial expressions at the beginning of the retreat indicated that many of them were crying. Their faces showed anxiety, or sadness. By the end of the retreat many of them looked relaxed and began to smile and some were even laughing. Their body language was also observed at the beginning of the retreat. As they were telling their stories some were shaking their legs, fidgeting, tearful, folding and unfolding tissues. By the end of the retreat the attendees appeared to be much more relaxed and peaceful. The observations indicated that there was movement in the facial expressions, body language and participation of the attendees.

Interviews

Interview questions were emailed to each of the participants a few months after the retreat to determine if continuity of healing occurred. They were asked to complete five questions and return them to me via email. When many of the participants did not respond as requested telephone calls were made to them and the participants were asked those same questions by telephone. The following were the questions and the responses of the participants:

1. What did you like most about the retreat?

(Participant One) – “I enjoyed everything about the retreat. The things that I benefitted from the most were (1) Sharing my story, which allowed me to uncover the shame in a safe place. (2) Naming the child and writing a letter to my child. (3) The Bereavement service.”

(Participant Two) – “A lot of things. I liked the atmosphere of the room; the lighting, the love felt from the team. All of that.”

(Participant Three) – “I liked that participants were open and honest. I also liked that the facilitators didn’t just facilitate, they also spoke of their experiences. And I liked that the facilitators made us feel comfortable and safe enough to want to express what we were feeling.”

(Participant Four) – “I liked the fact that the coordinators were patient and they showed a lot of love. And they made me feel comfortable, after a while to be able to express myself about how I was feeling. And the fact that I wasn’t being judged. And I was able to look at myself and see that I was judging myself about the decision I made when I had the abortion. I was able to look at myself differently and know that God still loved me in spite of the decision I made. I was shown that I made that decision and God still loved me. It was a relief. I got some freedom.”

(Participant Five) – Did not respond.

(Participant Six) – Did not respond.

2. If there was something about the retreat you could change, what would it be?

(Participant One) – “I would not change anything.”

(Participant Two) – “I can’t think of anything.”

(Participant Three) – “I really pondered that question. I would probably add a day. I would have it longer. It was very intense and so maybe spread it out more. Even though it was very helpful. It was a purging experience. But I walked away drained because there was so much packed into a couple of days. I would maybe add a day or maybe have the first day be a full day because once we started we jumped in with all fours.”

(Participant Four) – “To me everything was laid out right. Nothing. It worked for me. If you find something you want to put in there it would be a plus, but it worked for me as it is.”

(Participant Five) - Did not respond.

(Participant Six) - Did not respond.

3. Do you feel that you received healing during the retreat? Why or why not?

(Participant One) – “I received healing because the emotions that had been hidden for many years were identified and released. I was healed the moment I felt the burden lift as I spent time with the bereavement doll.”

(Participant Two) – “Yes, because I was able to let go of some emotions I did not know I was holding on to. I was able to grieve and move past it.”

(Participant Three) – “I do. I really do. I thought God would not forgive me. Nobody could tell me that God would forgive me. I definitely walked away stepping a little bit lighter. I walked away with a sense of gladness, relief, knowing that He forgives me. It's just a good feeling because for years since I was 16 and now I am 63, for years I thought that God would not forgive me and I was going to hell. It didn't matter what anybody said, I thought I was going to hell. Imagine it was like a weight being lifted off of me. Sometimes I frequently think about the retreat experience and I thank God for that. There was a reason I was supposed to be there and I believe that was the reason. So God could tell me that I am forgiven through you all. And it became so plain to me when one of the facilitators said, “Well haven't you committed other sins?” We determine which sin is worse than our other sins. If you can be forgiven for lying or stealing why can't you be forgiven for terminating a pregnancy?” “I put God in my human box and decided what God could forgive me for and what he couldn't forgive me for and I have lived with that for years. So I feel like I have truly been liberated. I believe so many women can benefit from the retreat.”

(Participant Four) – “Yes. I received healing that I didn't know I needed. As I grew older my thing was, abortion is not a way of birth control. After I got older and looked at the world and realized that it didn't have to happen. I thank God I was able to come and get some freedom.”

(Participant Five) - Did not respond.

(Participant Six) - Did not respond.

4. Was sharing your story therapeutic or helpful to you?

(Participant One) – “Yes it was because it made me feel comfortable and freed me to tell my story.”

(Participant Two) – “Yes. I think with anything when we are able to verbalize, not only are we sharing it, but feeling it. We cannot heal what we don't know. As we share our stories, things come to us that we had not thought about. Being able to talk about it in an environment where there is no judgment helped us. But sharing

helps us to be able to process and understand things about ourselves that we did not know.”

(Participant Three) – “Yes. It was helpful in that it was therapeutic. It was therapeutic because I was able to freely express my feelings. First of all I was able to honestly tell the participants what I had been through; the number of times I'd been through it. It was a trusting environment. I had no qualms about sharing my story, honestly sharing my story.”

(Participant Four) – “Yes it was very helpful because it gave me a chance to say how I felt. Say how I was feeling about myself. It gave me a chance to deal with the pain I had pushed back. It helped me a whole lot to be able to talk about it, it has been forty years. I felt so guilty and so ashamed.”

(Participant Five) - Did not respond.

(Participant Six) - Did not respond.

5. Has your relationship with/or thoughts about God changed in any way since the retreat?

(Participant One) – “Yes. I know without a doubt that God forgave me for taking the life of my child and that my child is in heaven with the Father.”

(Participant Two) – “No. Not me.”

(Participant Three) – “Yes. I feel it has. And I always knew how awesome God is. God is wonderful. God is awesome. And I've always trusted God. But I think this experience has drawn me closer to God. Because I feel like "Lord I know you're wonderful, I know you are. But you're more than that. I don't even have the words. I just shake my head in amazement, like you're really good. You love me that much God? I'm just overwhelmed. I feel that it has drawn me closer. But I also have a sense of being overwhelmed. The magnitude of what I did and the magnitude of the forgiveness of God is just overwhelming to think about. It makes me love him that much more. There are no human words that can capture the goodness of God.”

(Participant Four) – “I always knew God loved me but I thought I had to get some punishment for my acts. But now I don't feel that way. Whenever something bad used to happen to me, I said, this is my punishment. But now I know God has not punished me. I have been forgiven.”

(Participant Five) - Did not respond.

(Participant Six) - Did not respond.

The final interview questions gave me further insight as to whether or not the healing carried over once the participants returned to their homes and back to their normal lives. Two of the participants did not respond to the interview questions. However, those who responded overwhelmingly agreed that they experienced healing, freedom from guilt, forgiveness and a deeper relationship with God. It was my hope that once they returned to their homes healing would continue. Evidence from the telephone interviews indicate that goal was reached.

Conclusion

The following are my conclusions relative to the hypothesis of the study that proposes, when women realize that God is able to transform them and begin them on a healing journey by working through issues of unresolved grief, shame and guilt, they will be able to move forward to a healthier future. What I wanted the outcome of my project to be was, a strong sense of love from God. A strong sense of sisterhood from the participants, and the beginning of a journey of healing for those who were in attendance. Pre and post-surveys and observations indicated a change in the way most of the participants viewed God and their relationship with God after the retreat. Three months later, telephone interviews were conducted. I believe the project was successful in allowing the attendees to experience the love of God and begin their journey towards healing. The final interview questions and their responses validate these findings.

One thing that became very apparent to me was my focus for participants did not end up as I intended. Initially my goal was to reach out to seminary students. Additionally, I invited only women. Also, the name of the project was “Changing the

Subject: Creating Caring Communities for Women Impacted by Abortion.” No seminary students responded to my invitation and a man registered to attend the retreat.

Half of the participants who attended were members of my family who responded to invitations sent to them requesting that they invite their friends who might be interested in participating. After having a man participate I felt the name of my study should be changed from “Changing the Subject: Creating Caring Communities for Women Impacted by Abortion to Changing the Subject: Creating Caring Communities for Persons Impacted by Abortion. The women participating accepted the male attendee and were able to listen to him as he shared his story from a male perspective.

On the first evening of the project all of the participants appeared to be very tense. Also, family members who were attending were not aware that other family members would be there. Nor did they know that each other had experienced abortion. Once everyone began to tell their stories, one participant noted that as family members they see each other at family outings; they always look good, but no one knew how much each of them were hurting inside.

I learned from the retreat that space should be given for men to attend the retreat and outreach should be done to include men. The retreat should be more inclusive as a way of understanding that men are impacted by abortion and are part of the learning community.

It was suggested that the retreat either last for an additional day or more time be given on opening day because of the strenuous work that is being done during the weekend. More time may allow the participants an opportunity to process what has happened. Telling of stories, listening to healing scriptures and writing healing letters allowed some of the participants to see themselves in the biblical narratives and hear

through the word of God how God still loved them as God did many of the other imperfect people in the Bible. Acknowledging their losses, naming their unborn babies, writing letters to them and participating in a memorial service allowed the participants to grieve their losses in the company of others who had experienced what they had been through and to support each other. By the end of the retreat the atmosphere was more relaxed, peaceful and even sometimes jovial.

Final Thoughts

God can do exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or think. I prayed about this project mightily, but it never occurred to me that God's intention was to bring healing to my family first. I am humbled to be used as a catalyst to help bring healing to my family and to the others who were in attendance.

God was also very intentional about teaming me up with two women who have become my sisters in this journey, Minister Pamela Bell from Baltimore, Maryland and Dr. Karen Stevenson from Atlanta, Georgia. I am sure that this relationship is God ordained because there is no way I could have met these women except God put us together. Again, God has proved to me that God will give you just what you need. Another person who has been a blessing in this journey has been my sister who traveled to Indiana with me to support me in my own healing and then assisted me with my project. I could never have done this without the help of many people who cared enough about me and this project to do whatever was asked of them without hesitation or question. I am truly grateful for each and every one of them.

The impact of unresolved grief can be very devastating for many years. I dedicate this project to the countless men and women who have been impacted by the guilt and shame of voluntary pregnancy termination and have kept it a secret. It is my prayer that God will point them in the direction to share their stories in a safe place where they can find divine healing and forgiveness on their journey together.

APPENDIX A

RETREAT FLYER, INITIAL LETTER, APPLICATION, AND WELCOME

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Retreat Flyer

Emotional Healing

You are forgiven. Take time to heal.

**enjoy a deeper bond with loved ones*
**attract healthier relationships*
**become the confident person*
God created you to be!

Rachel's Vineyard Weekend Retreat

For those who experienced abortion

Fri Sept. 15, 2017 @6 p.m. – Sun Sep. 17, 2017 @12 p.m.

Cenacle Retreat & Conference Center

513 W. Fullerton Pkwy. Chicago, IL 60614



Invest In Your Emotional Health

Heal hidden wounds caused by abortion

Learn more about Post Abortion Healing www.rachelsvineyard.org

A Terminated Pregnancy Can Cause:

Low Self-Esteem	Bouts of Depression
Sleep Disturbances	Eating Disorders
Unhealthy relationships	Sexual Promiscuity
Repeat Crisis Pregnancies	Emotional Numbness
Not finishing projects/goals	Anger/Rage Reactions and more...
Substance Abuse	

Registration Contact: Rev. Karen Walker-McClure (573) 823- 9210

Scholarships available to first 6 people who register. **(Deadline 8/31/17)**

Includes: Lodging + 5 meals + healing exercises + professional counseling.



Rachel's Vineyard Retreat
Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center
513 W. Fullerton Parkway
Chicago, IL 60614

Dear:

September 4, 2017

We are pleased to learn of your desire to attend our Rachel's Vineyard Weekend Healing Retreat scheduled for September 15-17, 2017 at Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center. We will contact you soon to give you more detailed information such as a map, check-in time, and schedule.

There will be no cost for this weekend retreat. However in order to secure your registration we are asking you to mail the completed Participation Information and Agreement sheets to: _____ Or you may scan and email them back to me at _____.

We commend you for your courage to enter into a journey of healing. During the coming weeks prior to our weekend together, we will be praying for you and will be available to you if you should need encouragement or a sympathetic ear. Please do not hesitate to call me at _____.

Our ministry team is a group of caring and compassionate individuals who have worked together to provide you with a safe and welcoming atmosphere. Our goal is to make your weekend retreat an experience that will bring insight, comfort and healing.

You have been commended to our prayer team who have already begun to pray for you and will remember you in prayer each day. This team of dedicated pray-ers will continue to pray for you throughout the weekend and during the days and weeks that follow. During the entire retreat weekend the team will be lifting you up in prayer.

We look forward to meeting you and trust that we will all be blessed by our time together.

Sincerely,

Do not be afraid, _____ I am with you. I have called you by your name and you are mine. When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you. For I am the Lord your God who saves. You are precious in my eyes and I love you. --Isaiah 43

Rachel's Vineyard Retreat
September 15-17, 2017
 Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center
 513 W. Fullerton Parkway
 Chicago, IL 60614

CONFIDENTIAL PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Name _____
 (first & last)

Today's Date _____

Mailing Address _____

Email: _____

City & Zip _____

Phone numbers: _____ (home) ☐
 _____ (work) ☐
 _____ (cell/pager) ☐

Check if it is okay to leave a first name only message.

Religious background _____

Are you currently practicing your faith on a regular basis? _____

Are you currently taking any medications? _____ If so please list below.

Do you have any special needs/ disabilities/ special dietary needs/ or allergies?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes please list:

Do you have an allergy to incense? Yes _____ No _____

Do you have a hearing problem? Yes _____ No _____
Do you have a visual impairment? Yes _____ No _____

Emergency contacts from 5:00 p.m. (9/15/17 – 9/17/17)

Physician's Name _____
Phone _____

Friend/Relative Name _____
Phone _____

Friend/Relative Name _____
Phone _____

What do you hope to gain by attending this program?

Do you have any questions or fears you would like addressed before coming?
_____ Yes _____ No Please List:

List 3 things you would like the team to know about you.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Are you comfortable in a spiritual setting? _____

Number and date(s) of Abortion(s) _____

Number and date(s) of Miscarriage(s) _____

How long since last abortion? _____

Your present age _____

Are you currently seeing a psychiatrist _____ or a
counselor _____?

If yes please fill in the following information:

Name of the
professional _____

Address _____

State _____ Zip _____ Phone
number _____

Do we have your permission to contact them if
needed? _____

Medical/Psychiatric Conditions:

Do we have your permission to have our counselor contact
you? _____

Rachel's Vineyard Retreat
Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center
513 W. Fullerton Parkway
Chicago, IL 60614

Dear Participant

September 13, 2017

We are approaching our September 15-17, Rachel's Vineyard Retreat at the Cenacle Retreat & Conference Center. Please wear comfortable clothing. The Retreat Center will provide all bedding, towels, etc.

Now I'd like to address deeper matters of the heart and soul. It is normal if you are experiencing apprehension. If you feel anxious, please know that you are not alone. There are others who are coming on this retreat who feel the same way. Although this feeling can be disconcerting, it can also be motivating. It may have influenced your registering for this retreat, which is a giant step for you to take on your healing path! Signing up for Rachel's Vineyard required both courage and faith.

I encourage you to be steadfast in your resolve to help yourself with the gift of this retreat. The retreat offers a nurturing environment, so that it is possible for you to go back through sad memories of loss, and then journey forward into the healing you seek. Many of God's blessings and graces await you, if you will persevere.

We recommend getting extra rest before your retreat because you will have very full days and late nights. During the weekend you'll be processing a lot...mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Being well-rested when you arrive will help you immensely. Also, if it is possible to take off work on Monday, you might consider doing so to give yourself an opportunity to rest following the retreat.

You will have the option to invite family members or close friends to the Memorial Service and Closing Worship service Sunday. If you chose to invite someone they should arrive at 10:30. At the conclusion of the retreat we will have light refreshments. The retreat will conclude no later than 1:30.

The team of helpers are prayerfully preparing for your weekend, and look forward to welcoming you at 5:00 p.m. Friday. Dinner will be served at 6:00. If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to call or text me at _____. I can be reached through Thursday evening. On Friday, September 15th, if you need help with the directions or finding the Retreat House, please call _____.

May God watch over you and protect you as you prepare for this pilgrimage of healing.

In Christ's Peace,
Facilitator

APPENDIX B
SCHEDULE AND ORDER OF WORSHIP

Rachel's Vineyard Retreat Schedule
Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center
513 W. Fullerton Parkway
Chicago, IL 60614
Friday, September 15 - - Sunday, September 17, 2017

Friday

6:00 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 p.m.	Welcome and Introductions in Gathering Space – Pre-Survey
8:30 p.m.	Living Scriptures in Gathering Space
10:00 p.m.	Movie Presentation
10:30 p.m.	Living Scriptures in Gathering Space

Saturday

8:00 a.m.	Breakfast
9:00 a.m.	Telling our stories: Gathering Space
12:00 noon	Lunch
1:00 p.m.	Living Scripture in Gathering Space
2:00 p.m.	Group Work on Anger and Buried Emotions
4:30 p.m.	Living Scripture in Gathering Space
6:00 p.m.	Dinner
6:30 p.m.	Living Scripture in Gathering Space

Sunday

8:00 a.m.	Breakfast
9:00 a.m.	Meet in Gathering Space
11:00 a.m.	Memorial Service in Chapel
12:00 p.m.	Closing Worship
1:00 p.m.	Refreshments – Post Survey

NOTE: Meals are served promptly with NO Exceptions. If you arrive after meal time, you will miss the meal.

Go in Peace to love and serve the Lord

**Rachel's Vineyard Retreat
Memorial Worship Service**

Welcome/Opening Prayer.....Dr. Karen Stevenson
Scripture.....Minister Pam Bell
Selection.....Kenyatta Williams Ross
Memorial.....Minister Pam Bell
Sermonic Selection..... Kenyatta Williams Ross
Sermon.....Rev. Karen Walker-McClure
Benediction..... Rev. Karen Walker-McClure




Closing Reception



APPENDIX C


PRE-/POST-RETREAT SURVEY AND POST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



**Changing the Subject: Creating Caring Communities for Women Impacted by
Abortion
Pre-/Post-Retreat Survey**


Directions: Underline the image that best represents your opinion.


- | | | |
|---|--|--|
|  Always |  Sometimes |  Never |
|---|--|--|
-
1. I believe God will forgive anything if I ask for forgiveness.



 




 2. I believe abortion can cause persons to have guilt and shame.


 




 3. When I had my abortion, I did not feel anyone could understand how I felt.







 
 4. I believe abortion is a choice women should have a right to make.




 





 5. I thought an abortion would change my life for the better.




 





 6. I still experience guilt from the abortion.

  
 7. I believe I should not ask for forgiveness if I know what I am doing is wrong.

  
 8. I never thought about the abortion again after it happened.

  
 9. Professional help will help my faith foundation.

  
 10. Telling my story is therapeutic or helpful for me.

**Changing the Subject: Creating Caring Communities for Women Impacted by
Abortion
Pre-/Post-Retreat Survey**



Directions: Underline the image that best represents your opinion.

 Always


 Sometimes

 Never

1. I believe God will forgive anything if I ask for forgiveness.  

2. I believe abortion can cause persons to have guilt and shame.  

3. When I had my abortion, I did not feel anyone could understand how I felt. 
 
4. I believe abortion is a choice women should have a right to make.  

5. I thought an abortion would change my life for the better.  

6. I still experience guilt from the abortion.   
7. I believe I should not ask for forgiveness if I know what I am doing is wrong.   
8. I never thought about the abortion again after it happened.   
9. Professional help will help my faith foundation.   
10. Telling my story is therapeutic or helpful for me.   

**Changing the Subject: Creating Caring Communities for Women Impacted by
Abortion
Post Retreat Interview Questions**

1. What did you like most about the retreat?
2. If there was something about the retreat you could change, what would it be?
3. Do you feel that you received healing during the retreat? Why or why not?
4. Was sharing your story therapeutic or helpful to you?
5. Has your relationship with/or thoughts about God changed in any way since the retreat?

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